

John 8:12-20

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Preacher: Chris Roberts

[0:00] Well it's fantastic, I've been really looking forward to getting back into the book of John. It's going to be great, I hope we'll all benefit, I'm sure we will benefit from that.

Keep that passage open. You know, just a few weeks ago some friends came back from a summer trip to the south of France. And I've got to say that they went Euro camping and I've got to say that as they were describing this, it sounded like paradise, I was green with envy.

Until the moment they mentioned that they'd taken a day trip to Euro Disney with the kids. Now I don't know if you've been there, you may love the place, but I've got to confess I don't really understand the concept of it.

You know, you go to the most romantic city in the world and then you spend the afternoon with Goofy and Mary Poppins. It's sort of beyond me really. But I don't have kids so there you go.

Anyway, one evening apparently they'd stayed on into the night to see the elaborate firework display that they show there at the end of each evening in the summer. It was a huge affair, a spectacle, and probably thousands of Euros worth of fireworks were lit in one evening.

[1:13] Truly magical and thousands of people were there on holiday to have a bit of a good time, to enjoy themselves. They'd gathered for some good times, for a bit of fun, to light up their lives with the novelty of it all.

But after the show, and I don't know if you've ever had that feeling of dissatisfaction really, with even the best things in life. When it was over they said they had a distinct feeling of an anti-climax as they headed back to the car park.

It's banal really, isn't it? Because tomorrow the fireworks at Euro Disney would be lit up again. And the night after that, and the night after that, it would be one trip back on the Eurostar to Waterloo.

Then back to Ealing. And back to reality with a bump. And you know, it's that kind of post-holiday blues, if you want to call it, that post-holiday scenario, that the holiday makers in John's Gospel are about to experience for another year.

So it's a similar scene. This section that I've read out just a minute ago, it's a similar scene to what I've just described. The section comes here in the public holidays of the Jewish people.

[2:31] So if you flip back a page to chapter 7 and verse 2, you'll see there John tells us, Now the Feast of Booths was at hand.

Or the Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. So it's a Jewish public holiday. It's a feast. It's one of the most popular festivals of the year. Thousands of people get a few days off work.

They and their families have poured into the streets of Jerusalem. So it's a bit like the craze that's at Euro Disney. It's the craze that we get at Christmas time.

It's what they've been looking forward to for a whole month. Or if you shop at Harrods for eight months. It would be a week of parties. And then the grand finale, they'd have a lamp lighting ceremony.

In the court of the temple. So there would have been torches. There would have been lights illuminating the streets. From the city.

[3:34] From the temple mount. So it's the annual family firework display, isn't it? And these people are on a public holiday.

They are looking for something to light up their lives. But as Jesus speaks in this passage, the post-holiday blues are setting in. There is dissatisfaction in the air.

It's near the end of the festival. John tells us in verse 37 of chapter 7. We're going to land in our passage in a moment. But he tells us there that it was the last day of the festival.

The celebration was coming to an end. It was reaching its climax. It was just about to end. The torches were going to go out for another year. The lamps were going to be extinguished.

And darkness was going to return to the streets of Jerusalem. And to their lives for another year. But Jesus stands up, doesn't he?

[4 : 34] In chapter 8, verse 12. They're looking for some light and hope in their lives on this holiday. But they know that the lights of the festival are short-lived.

Those lights will be going out tonight. But Jesus says, I am the light of the world. And what he says here at this moment, it gets a reaction from the religious leaders.

It's well-timed. It's well-targeted, this statement he's making here. He makes it at this festival. So, in the next few moments, I just want us to see two things about this passage.

Two C's. Firstly, the claim. The claim that Jesus makes. And, you know, a couple of years after this event, they would look back.

It was the kind of thing that would make this Feast of Booths different from all the others. Just let me give you a bit of background on this. You know, here they are at the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Tabernacles.

[5 : 38] And it was given, this feast, to the people of God in the Old Testament. So, you can read about it in Leviticus chapter 23. It was given to them just after God had rescued them from Egypt.

And so, it was to remind them of how God had saved them from the darkness of slavery in Egypt. It was to remind them of their journey in the wilderness when they'd lived in tents or booths or tabernacles.

And this lamp-lighting ceremony on the last day was to remind them of how God had led them out of the darkness of Egypt, through the darkness of the wilderness, to the unknown land that he promised them.

But he'd led them in a pillar of light, in a pillar of fire, through the darkness of the night, out of Egypt. And throughout the people's history, that that darkness of Egypt has become shorthand for the darkness of sin in their lives.

Egypt has become a kind of euphemism for the oppression that sin brings to life. So, the addictions that the misery, that sin, that rebellion against God brings to life, that is the darkness, let alone the offence that it causes at God.

[7 : 10] You know, one man said, you don't break God's laws, they break you. That is the darkness that we feel when we go against God's laws.

We don't break them, they break us. It is a dark thing to sin against God. Going against God is a dark thing.

You know, another writer said it's like a banquet in the grave. That is what sin is. A banquet in the grave. And there, that evening, at that moment, when the torches are burning, and the fire from the four huge lamps in the temple court is licking up into the cold night air.

The average Jew, with any sense of occasion, well, he'd be welling up at this point, wouldn't he? So, it's the last night of the proms, isn't it? The land of hope and glory. They're thinking about the good old days.

The days of Moses. The days of Moses. And being led, rescued out of the darkness of Egypt. The days of being rescued from the oppression of sin.

[8 : 25] And the images of light in the Bible are going through their minds as well, aren't they? Psalm 27. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Proverbs 6. The word of God is a light to my path. And the promise of Isaiah for the future, the Lord himself would be a light for his people, dealing with sin, finally leading them out of the darkness.

So, think of it, the average Jew at this feast, this festival, he is thinking about being led through the darkness, out of slavery, led by the light of God, led to a land of life with God, a promise of God himself coming, and meeting and living with them, being a light to them.

It's a wonderful image, isn't it? And all of that is tied up with the image of light. It's a loaded issue for them at this festival. But it's a bittersweet moment, isn't it?

As they look at the lights of the festival, because they're in Jerusalem, and it isn't the land of hope and glory, is it? The Roman occupation is in full swing, all they've got are the lights of this festival.

[9 : 46] What they need is the light of God. And the promises of God seem like a myth. And so what Jesus claims, I am the light of the world, he claims at a very specific moment, so that the people will put two and two together.

They see the festival lights, and all that they represent to them. They hear his claim, and they know he is claiming.

He is claiming to be the universal, personal, and exclusive fulfillment of all of that Old Testament prophecy. He is the one to lead them out of slavery, to be God's light to them, to light up their lives, truly.

So everything that they're celebrating is met in the person of Jesus. Everything that they are remembering about God, what he did for them in Egypt, is met in Jesus, and not only for them, but for the whole world.

I am the light of the world. I will lead the entire world, if they will follow me, out of the darkness of sin. I will lead China.

[11:10] I will lead India. I will lead Libya. And London. Out of sin. I am the light of the world, Jesus says.

That is the great claim that he makes. And it has a wonderful consequence, doesn't it? Did you see there, verse 12 again, the second part of his claim, and whoever follows me, will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

You will be free from sin. Whoever follows me. That is the claim. But secondly, and this is the flip side of it, flip side of it, there is corruption at this festival.

There is corruption here. And this is really where we get into the meat of the passage, because it's this claim of Jesus to be the light of God to the whole world that causes a kind of chain reaction, doesn't it?

I can read it really well, actually. You'll see he makes, doesn't he, this claim. And what we hear next is this reaction. So if you look at verse 13, the beginning of verse 13, he makes the claim, and then it says, so the Pharisees said to him.

[12:27] So the religious leaders are reacting to this claim, aren't they? But they are corrupt. They are the ultimate party poopers there, aren't they?

The festival is drawing to a close. Jesus is saying, look, although the holiday is over, the good news is that actually everything that you need, that this festival represents, is in me.

Every day will be the feast of booths with me. Every day will be a walking away from the darkness with me.

But some people, the religious leaders, are corrupt in their thinking. They are corrupt in what they love in their lives.

They are corrupt in what they, what they want, what they treasure in their lives. And they don't want, want what is on offer.

[13:26] The claim shows that they are corrupt. They aren't having any of it, are they? So they start interrogating Jesus. But they are corrupt.

Verse 15, Jesus says, look, you judge according to the flesh. They are worldly men. They like to, they like the lights of the festival, don't they?

The lights of religion. But they don't want the true light. They don't want Jesus, do they? They're not thinking about God.

And this great claim of, and this offer of light for them in their lives. Well, they attack it. They don't receive it. They want to undermine his claim.

So they want to discredit what he says, don't they, about himself. So they take pot shots at him, don't they? So if you look at verse 13, there's the attack. The attack they make.

[14:26] You are bearing witness about yourself, Jesus. Your testimony is not true. That's the attack. Now what they're doing here is actually remembering something that Jesus has already said that John has told us about, but they're taking it totally out of context.

So if you turn back to chapter 5 and verse 31, chapter 5, verse 31, Jesus is having a similar conversation here with some people and he says, chapter 5, 31, if I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true.

So he is saying, isn't he, yes, that is true. If I make these outlandish claims about myself and if I'm the only one who makes those claims about me, well, that's true.

I'm false, aren't I? I'm not making a claim that can be validated. But the next verse after that, he's pretty clear as well, isn't he?

He goes on to say that there is another who bears witness about him and he's talking about John the Baptist there and he also goes on to talk about God himself.

[15:45] So whenever he is speaking, those other witnesses back him up about whatever he's saying about himself. but the Pharisees choose to forget that.

So it's a cheap shot really, it's a bit of a non-argument. But Jesus nevertheless answers, and I want us to get this, it's odd what he says here, turn back to chapter 8, it's odd what he says, verse 14, Jesus answered, even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, and get this, for I know where I came from, and where I am going, but you do not know where I came from or where I am going.

It's an odd thing what he says there, isn't it? But his argument is to say there that his testimony, his claim of being the light of the world, is validated by his unique origin, and his unique destiny. Even if he were to make a solitary claim about himself, which he doesn't, but even if he was to do that, his claim would be valid, he is saying, because his origin is unique, and his destiny is unique. He knows where he comes from, and he knows where he is going. He has come from heaven itself, and his destiny is to return there, and the knowledge of that, makes him confident in his own claim. [17:29] Knowing where he had come from, and where he is returning to, makes him sure that what he is saying about himself is true.

But they don't know that, do they, about him, so they don't believe. believe. So, some people's problem, when they hear the claims of Jesus, is that they refuse them, they refuse what's on offer, because they don't want to recognise where Jesus has come from, and where he is now. He has come from heaven, heaven. So, his claim is true. And it's ironic, isn't it, you know, that the very people who are the spiritual leaders of God's people in this passage, don't know the God they claim to worship.

What a terrible situation they're in. Jesus has another witness, God the Father, but when they hear the words of Jesus, they only hear a solitary voice, because they don't know God.

Where is your Father, they say, verse 19, you know neither my Father, if you knew me, you would know my Father also. Folks, we'll continue to look at this passage, I've given you a bit of a snack in that this week, we'll look at this further, but as we close, now we've got to see the claim that Jesus makes.

[19:06] He is offering to lead you out of the dark places of your life. He is offering to lead you out of the darkness of sin, to give you the light of life.

But there is a warning here, isn't there? That by judging by the reaction of these other people, Jesus' claim will either draw you in, or it will expose your corruption, as you hear his claim.

You know, it's worth noticing, isn't it, that this whole conversation, I don't know if you saw that, look at verse 20, where are they? This whole conversation, verse 20, these words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple.

And you wonder, don't you, the religious leaders, they make the choice, don't they, between accepting the light of Jesus, and sticking with the lights of the festival, the revenue that that brings in for them, in status, and in repute, in the temple.

But they cannot accept Jesus' unique origin and his destiny to return to heaven, so they don't realise that his claim is validated. but as they do that, they will settle for the lights of this world, but they will go out, they will be short-lived, but Jesus offers a light that will give you life.

[20:51] Following him, the light will never go out. Well, let's pray together. Father, thank you for this fantastic passage, and we pray that we would understand that the claim Jesus makes is right and true, because of his origin, and where he belongs in heaven, that you have validated that.

Help us to believe then what he says, that he is the light of the world, and that those who follow him will not walk in darkness. Help us to walk in the light, following Jesus this week, we pray in his name.

Amen.