

John 8:12

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Preacher: Gethin Jones

[0 : 00] Let's turn now to God's word. Please turn back to John chapter 8, which we read from earlier. As I mentioned, we will be looking at that one verse, verse 12, this evening of chapter 8.

Let's find out, okay? James 94. One simple verse. 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.

And as we heard it in the dead, this word, let's pray together. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you for your word. And we ask that you would make it effective in us for our salvation.

And so to that end, we ask that you would work in us by the power of your spirit, helping us to attend to this word diligently, readily, and prayerfully.

Help us to receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives. This we ask in the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the Holy Spirit, one God, forever blessed. Amen.

[1 : 25] In the longer reading that we had earlier, at the end of chapter 7, we came across a man called Nicodemus. And as John mentioned, and if you're familiar with the rest of the book of John's Gospel, you'll know that we first meet Nicodemus a few chapters earlier in chapter 3.

And he was the great teacher of Israel. He was the expert, he was the theological expert in Israel. And he was also the eyewitness of that moment when Jesus said the most well-known verse in the Bible, John 3.16.

And at that first interaction, John makes a point of saying that when Nicodemus came to Jesus, it was night time. And as far as we can tell by the end of that conversation, Nicodemus seemed still to be in the dark.

And yet, it seems that Jesus had made quite the impression. Nicodemus hadn't forgotten this conversation, and in chapter 7, we learn that Nicodemus' story is not yet open.

He may not have been fully won over yet, but he at least wanted Jesus to be treated fairly. So while he may not have exactly spoken in favour of Jesus, he at least spoke in favour of justice. And even for that, his colleagues sneered at him. And John tells us that they told this great teacher of Israel to search, that is to search the scriptures, you will find no predictions of the prophet coming from Galilee. And that may be, of course they're overlooking or just didn't know that Jesus was actually born in Bethlehem, which is, as they mentioned, where they expect the prophet to come from. But, what would happen if Nicodemus did go and have a look? What if he did search in the scriptures, and what gets about Galilee in the scriptures? And he wouldn't have found very much. But once he got to Isaiah, and what we know of as chapter 9, he would have read this. But there would be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali. But in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

[4 : 01] Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness on them has light shone. And as you read through John's Gospel, your mind barely has time to get there before you hear the voice of Jesus resonating through the courtyard, I am the light of the world. And the cameras pan over to the temple to catch up with this next part where Jesus is praying out, I am the light of the world.

Now later in chapter 20, we are told specifically, in verse 20 sorry, chapter 8, we are told specifically that he is in the section of the temple called the treasury. If you see that, just right at the top of the page. This was a part of the temple that had great big containers, shaped like a ram's horn, the big trumpets that they would use. And people would put their offerings in these big containers. We know from elsewhere in the Bible, this was a bit of a temple where everyone was allowed in. So Mark and Luke tell us the story of the widow who got to this part to leave her two coins in the

treasury. Which means that it is very, very likely that at this point Jesus is standing in the bit of the temple we own as the court of the women, the women's courtyard. And of course by this point, they are all queuing up to ask you to get in so what?

So I will explain. At this point we learn in chapter 7 that everyone is in Jerusalem for a festival called Sukkot. The Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths. And you might know some of the details from RE classes or if you have neighbours who are in the Jewish community who might still celebrate this festival. There is something about it. The main thing to know here is that it was a feast that remembered how the Lord was with Israel while it was wandering in the desert and as they lived in tents.

And this was the big party of the year. The whole city would be decorated in tents and huts with plants and fruits everywhere.

There were extravagant sacrifices offered every day at the temple for a week. This would have been the time when families and kids and grandparents would be flocking to Harrods and Harrods in Jerusalem and see all the special light displays and the carolers singing and the brass bands playing their Sukkot carols in every square. It was the huge celebration of the year.

[6 : 28] Part of this big celebration, this week of festival, was where they would go as a big crowd to the well outside the city to collect some water and then all parade up to pour it out into bowls on the altar in front of the temple and flow down from these bowls down the steps.

And it may not sound like a huge display, but it was a big party. The chauffeur, the trumpet would be sounding all over the place. Just think of the sound of car horns tooting away everywhere.

The Jewish palmer says that one who had never witnessed the rejoicing at the place of the water droids in this particular ceremony had never seen true joy in his life.

If you haven't seen this party, you ain't seen nothing yet. And it's in that context, after the last drop has flowed down, that Jesus has cried out, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

But another key part of this festival was light. And there were lights everywhere on the first night of this Feast of Boots. And quite possibly every night after that, it's not clear, but quite possibly several nights, there would be a huge light party.

[7 : 43] And in this court, the court of the women, there would have been great big golden lampstands. And don't think little hands, they think they would have been a limited torch.

They would have been about 25 meters high, and there may well have been several of them in this courtyard. And each of these lampstands would have four big bowls, and a ladder going up to each one.

And each ladder would have a priest that made up it, so four priests on each lamp. And they would each pour in 36 liters, or 8 to 9 gallons, of oil into each of the four bowls.

Then they would get some old rags to use as a wick, and light this great lamp. The Jewish Vishnu records that when they lit those lamps, there was another courtyard in all of Jerusalem that wasn't lit up by them.

And that wasn't all. At that point, the pious men of the city would come out with torches in their hands, and dance. It seems there would be some fire juggling going on, as part of the celebrations.

[8 : 44] And they would sing God's praises. And the Levites would get their instruments out, and they would party all night. And this party was all about remembering how, as Israel lived in the desert, and lived in their tents, God was in their midst to help them.

Just as all the courtyards in Jerusalem were lit up by these lamps, there was not a corner of the camp in the desert that was left in the dark, as they wandered through the desert.

If you go out into the countryside, go far away from any town or village, if it's a cloudy night, and you can't even see the stars, you will eventually get somewhere where it's so pitch black you just can't see anything, don't you?

And Israel spent 40 years in the desert, and they were never in the dark. They always had the bright, cloudy, fiery pillar of God's glory guiding them day and night.

They were always protected, always guided. They always had God at their side, in their midst. And they always had His light to walk by it.

[9 : 54] And there was such a huge blessing for them, that they put a permanent symbol of this in the temple sanctuary. And just before the Holy of Holies, there would be a table with 12 big loads of bread on one side, and a big lampstand, the menorah, on the other.

So this great light shining on the bread, this bread representing each tribe, this light of God's presence shining on the symbol of the people. And this huge blessing didn't just deserve a symbol in the temple where you couldn't see it, you just knew it was there.

It really deserved a big festival each year, and so there they were. And now it's the final day. The final night has passed. And actually, if you think of it, we're just six months away here from Jesus' crucifixion and His resurrection.

Six months away from a great shift in time from the old covenant to the new covenant. This is the last day on the last real Feast of Booths.

This should be the last one. Within six months, it will be replaced with another celebration, one that will come every week on the Lord's Day as we gather to worship.

[11:07] So if you think of all these feasts and symbols and stories and pictures in the Old Testament, as one huge arrow pointing forward, we've now come to the very tip of the arrow.

We're at this historic moment. The last dance has been danced. The last song has been sung. The water has stopped flowing from the altar. The lights are out.

And right there, under the empty lampstones, we hear the voice of Jesus. I am the light of the world. And light is a key theme in John's Gospel, as well as in the Bible in general. It's so often used to represent God as His presence.

At the beginning of the book, John has explained that in the Word was life, and this life is the light of men. That is to say that by this person, this divine person that we call the Word, it's by this life that all men live.

[12:12] And the mere fact that we are alive is, in a sense, a light to us. Our life shines out and speaks to us of God and His kindness each day.

Our very existence is a light pointing us to God. And it is a light that's shining in darkness ever since Adam turned away from God, as we looked at this morning.

And yet, we don't receive this light. We reject this light, this revelation from God constantly. And this light is a light that is, it's a creating light.

And it's a light that comes. He's not just our Creator, He's our Redeemer. The light is coming, deliberately coming to reach out for us. And it has been coming ever since the fall.

As soon as Adam fell, there was a promise of salvation. And mankind keeps rejecting this word of salvation and redemption. But here is the word that keeps coming.

[13:10] This light that keeps shining. And it kept coming in the light of the world. Here it is, come to tabernacle among us. Here is the light that fights against evil.

But also, not only does darkness represent evil, but also ignorance. And willful ignorance. So we see Nicodemus coming to Jesus. John points out that he comes at night.

He comes in ignorance to Jesus. Darkness also means danger and death. In chapter 6, the disciples are out on the seas in a dark and stormy night.

Before Jesus comes to them, walking on the waves. There too, John makes a point of statement. It was dark. It was dangerous and they were clueless. And so the commentator William Hedrickson, as he does this great statement of Jesus in chapter 8, says, To the ignorant, he proclaims wisdom. To the impure, holiness. To those in sadness, gladness. Moreover, to those who by sovereign grace are drawn to the light and follow its guidance, he not only proclaims, but actually imparts these blessings.

[14:23] He doesn't just talk about wisdom to the ignorant. Holiness to the impure. Gladness to the sad. And it's not just that he offers these good things to those in the dark.

He doesn't just say, I offer light to you. He says, I am the light of the world. But I am, of course, if you know, echoes the divine name, the name of God in Exodus and in Isaiah.

I, I am, it is I who am, the light of the world. And notice he doesn't just say, I am a light in the world. I am the light of the world. And to underline the importance of that, what he spells out in this verse, what it means for us and what needs to be done about it.

And so he doesn't say, I am the light, so you must understand everything in the light of who I am. But he doesn't say, I am the light, therefore you should contemplate me.

[15:30] Or therefore reflect my light into the world. Even though those things are important, and they are things that we should be doing. But first of all, at the heart of it all, here is Jesus' call.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Follow him. If Jesus is the light of the world, he is a light that we are to follow.

Now you couldn't be there at the festival as a well-taught Jew, standing there under these lampstones. And hear Jesus say, I am the light that you need to follow. Without immediately grasping that Jesus is saying something astonishingly, could you? Who was the light that Israel had to follow?

It was none other than the Lord himself. And here he is now in the flesh. The light of the world. As you read on, you see that the Pharisees reject him.

[16:38] They want to walk in darkness, and it is tragic. You can see quite clearly what the alternative to following Jesus is just here in this verse, can't you? Verse 12. The alternative is to walk in darkness.

Ignorance, impurity and sadness. It means not having the light of life. And later in verse 21, to make it even clearer, it means dying in our sins.

If someone were to go walking in a dark desert, and had the option of choosing to figure out his own route, or a brightly lit path, and he chooses to go his own way, it's just not going to end well, is it? And here we have the light of the world that must be followed. The one who saves from evil, and from danger, and from death. What's even worse actually, in terms of the Pharisees' rejection of him, is they don't even grasp what he's talking about.

They're not even properly listening. He's quite clearly saying to them, I am your God. I've come to you, I've come to guide you, I've come to save you.

[17:52] So if they'd understood him, and still wanted to disbelieve him, they would have immediately accused him of blasphemy. But there was so much in the dark, they couldn't even listen to what he was saying.

And he was the very person who was the centre of all things that they'd been celebrating for years and centuries, and they just couldn't recognise him.

And yet, for those who hear him, for those who listen, for those who understand, here is a call to follow Jesus.

He is a light for us to follow, not just for five minutes. It's a call to a constant, settled following. It's a call to follow him for life. And especially, a call to follow and receive life from him.

It's a call to depend on him in all things. It's a call to say to Jesus, you are my God. He is a light that you can know personally.

[18:52] He is a person. He is a light to guide you to eternal life. He is a light to come to save you from death. And it's precisely because of that, that he had to suffer darkness himself.

What we truly deserve, each of us here, is to be abandoned in sin and darkness and death. But Jesus, who at this hour, chose to be subjected to darkness of death for us, has come.

And it's because he faced the darkness of God's life for us, that he can then promise us, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

And so as we just consider this very simple message, let me ask each of you to think, what would prevent me from following him? Why would I not follow him?

So if you're already a follower of Jesus and have been for a long time, keep thinking, what would prevent me from keeping on following him? What might be trying to prevent me from following him right now?

[19:56] A little while ago, I came up with a striking paragraph in the Puritan of Thomas Brooks. And he said this, One of the devices of Satan is to persuade the soul that repentance is an easy word.

Why suppose you do sin, says Satan. There's no difficult thing to return, confess, beg pardon, and cry, Lord, have mercy upon me. For I will pardon your sin and save your soul.

But, the book goes on, repentance is a mighty work, a difficult work, a work beyond our power. You may as well seek to melt out of stone as to melt your own heart.

Repentance is a flower that does not grow in nature's garden. It is not in the power of man to repent at leisure. Repentance is eternal from darkness to light.

It affects the sinner's whole heart and life. It changes the heart from the power of sin to God. So, if you have this opportunity to turn now, why would you wait?

[21:14] What good reason could you have to hesitate and not turn now and follow him now? He is calling you, even now, to himself. Right here this evening, he is saying to you, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. That is what he promises to give you, if you trust in him this evening.

As a university, I was part of a choir. Most of what we did as a choir was to sing at an evensong service, that is a prayer service in the American tradition.

I wasn't at all familiar with it before I went there. Those of you who are familiar, will know that near the end of the evening prayers, there are three prayers or collects.

The first one would be different each week, and the last two are the same each time. The Dean would chant it on one note, and the choir would have different amens we'd have to chime in with.

[22 : 15] The final product says this. Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord. And by thy great mercy, defend us from all perils and dangers of this night.

For the love of thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. A step of faith can be that simple. I'm in the darkness, bring your light.

I want to follow Jesus. It can be that simple. For a moment I'm going to lead us in a prayer, and I'll be introducing those words.

And whether this will be your millionth step of faith in Jesus, or your very first step tonight. All it needs to be is a step.

So let's pray to him. Our loving Father in heaven, thank you for sending Jesus to be our light. Thank you that he faced and suffered the darkness that we deserved.

[23 : 22] And in his resurrection, he has become the light to eternal life. As we trust in him, we would ask you, lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O Lord.

And by your great mercy, defend us from all perils and dangers of this night. And of his dark world of sin and ignorance and sadness. For the love of your enemy, Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.