

I Am The Light Of The World

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Date: 16 April 2023

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[0 : 0 0] Well, today we are returning to our study in John's Gospel and we've come to the amazing words of John chapter 8 verse 12. Again, Jesus spoke to them saying, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life. These are very, very famous words from Jesus and they form part of what has come to be known as the great I am sayings that are recorded in John's Gospel. We've seen one of these already in John chapter 6. Jesus said, I am the bread of life. This is now the second one where he says, I am the light of the world. As we make our way through the rest of John's Gospel, we will encounter the other ones as we work our way through the chapters to come.

Jesus is making this amazing declaration that he is the light of the world. That's our title for our sermon today and it's telling us some incredibly important things. Instantly, it confronts us with the uniqueness of Jesus. He is the light that the world desperately needs and he is unique as that light. There's no other and that's why it's so important.

He's not saying, I am the light of the world. He is saying, I am the light of the world. He's confronting us with his uniqueness. It's also speaking to us of the beauty of Jesus. The language of light in Scripture is used to convey beauty and we see that in ourselves. We can even see that you think of yesterday, a beautiful sunny day, light, streaming down. It makes the grass look greener. It glistens on the sea as it laps against the shore. Light is beautiful and so it's speaking to us of the beauty of Jesus. The statement also speaks of what we can call the epistemological role of Jesus. That's a big word, epistemology. It basically is all about how we know what we know. Epistemology is about knowing stuff. How do we know stuff? When Jesus speaks of himself as the light of the world, he is speaking at one level epistemologically because he is emphasizing the fact that he is the one who brings illumination about spiritual reality. In other words, he shows us stuff. He teaches us stuff. He helps us to see and know things ourselves. More than anything else, Jesus shows us what God is really like because he is God. He is revealing himself to us in Jesus. It also speaks of the purity of Jesus. You have this great contrast between light and darkness. Jesus as light is the one in whom there is no darkness at all. There are loads in this statement and loads that we could talk about and we don't have time to do it all. We just want to say a little bit about this great statement and learn as much as we can. What I want us to reach is just to think a little bit about what he is making, but also this contrast between darkness and light that we have in these verses. We will get to a wee bit on that at the end.

Loads to say and think about. We will just be scratching the surface, but I hope it will be helpful to us all. When Jesus says these words, and the light of the world, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life, he is echoing a contrast that we have already seen in John's Gospel. If you want to read through John's Gospel quickly, if you are going to sit down and read through it quickly, look out for the times that light is mentioned because it comes up again and again. You actually see it in John's other writings in the Bible in his letters, 1st, 2nd and 3rd John as well.

Right at the very start of the Gospel, when John is introducing us to Jesus, he does so in terms of light. Speaking about how in him, in Jesus was life, that the life was the light of men, the light shines in darkness, darkness has not overcome it. Then he speaks about John the Baptist, there was a man sent from God, his name was John. He came as a witness, why? To bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. He was not the light, John the Baptist wasn't the light, he came to bear witness about the light because the true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world and that of course is speaking about Jesus. Same language appears again in John chapter 3. These are Jesus's words when he says, in this is the judgment, the light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his work should be exposed. But whoever does what his true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God. So you've got this great contrast being set before us again and again and again. John is making it absolutely clear that when we think about Jesus we should be thinking about the light that has come to shine in darkness.

[5 : 39] But it's not just John who makes this contrast, you actually find it all the way through scripture. You have it in Psalm 18 which we sang, we have it in Psalm 27 which we're going to sing together at the end. You have it in the prophets. Isaiah when he speaks about the coming of Jesus says, the people who walked in darkness have seen the great light, those who dwell in the land of deep darkness on them a light. As John, these words are prophetically speaking about Jesus. In fact, right at the very beginning, one of the very first things you encounter when you read page one of the Bible is this contrast between light and darkness. Indeed separation of light and darkness is a key creative act of God. The earth was without form and void, darkness was over the face of the deep and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters and God said, let there be light and there was light. And God saw that the light was good and God separated the light from the darkness. And last of all, you see the very same thing at the end of the Bible. Last chapter of the Bible, page 32, when it describes the new creation, it says, night will be no more. There will be no light of lamp or sun for the Lord God will be their light and they will reign forever and ever. And so when Jesus calls himself the light of the world, he is echoing all this language that runs right through scripture. And because of that, Jesus is making massive claims. When Jesus says these words, it's not just a kind of nice religious statement.

He is making massive claims. It's a claim to exclusivity. He is the light. He is the one that Isaiah prophesied. He is the one that John the Baptist prepared the way for.

He alone is the light that God has sent into the world. Jesus is claiming exclusivity. And he does that because he alone is the Son of God. And that ties into the second big claim he's making. This is also a claim to divinity, because the Old Testament ascribed the language of light to God. We saw that in the Psalms. The Lord is my light. When Jesus speaks of himself as the light, he's saying, I am God. I am God, the Son. It's a massive claim.

And because of all of that, because the claims are so big, this is also a statement that we, we have all got to reckon with. If Jesus alone is the light of the world, then our response to him, our relationship with him is more important than anything else.

Now, sometimes massive claims like this can be unsettling. You know, like, you don't really want to have to think through big stuff, big decisions, big claims, big issues. It's way more easier just to turn on the football highlights and switch off or play a game on the computer or whatever, pick up a magazine or a book. Dissection is always intellectually easier.

[9 : 05] So it's easier on our minds than thinking about big claims. These are questions and issues that are hard and challenging for us to think about. But the truth is, we actually need and want big claims in life. And that's because life is full of big decisions. It's inescapable that life is full of big decisions. And if you want to make a big decision, then you need big claims in order to help you make that choice.

So to give you some examples, in an election, candidates will make big claims about what they're going to do if they're elected. And it's on the basis of those claims that we have to make the massive decision as to who we want to elect as our next leader. In marriage, you have the massive claim that you're going to love somebody for the rest of your life.

And you have to make the decision to enter into that marriage on the basis of that claim, on the basis of that commitment. And even choosing which career to follow, then, you know, you're thinking about the big claims that others are making to you when people will say that they will educate you, or that they will train you, or that they will pay you, or that they will provide your pension for you when you need it. These are all massive claims, but we need those massive claims in order to make the decision to follow that particular path. It's maybe more helpful to see it in the opposite terms. Nobody, well, nobody in their right mind, elects a candidate who says, if I get elected, don't know what I'll do. I'll just make it up as I go along. Nobody votes for somebody like that. In marriage, nobody says, you know, oh, well, yeah, I might, might stick with you in a couple of years' time. It's not a way to get a girl, or a guy. It's not going to happen. Nobody's going to stick, nobody's going to think, oh, oh, well, okay, six months you might want me, might not. Nobody wants to enter into that kind of relationship. Nobody wants to sign up for a career where they're told, oh, we'll just pay you whatever. We'll teach you whatever.

We'll just make it up as we go. You don't sign up for these big decisions unless you have big claims to base that decision upon. Big decisions need big claims. And if all of that is true for stuff like elections, marriage, jobs, what about the biggest questions of all? The questions about God, the questions about eternity, the questions about life and death. For those questions, do you want to base your answers on small, tentative, vague claims? Of course you don't. For these questions, we need massive claims. And Jesus is giving them to us here. But the question immediately arises in people's minds. And if this question's arising in your head just now, it's okay. The question is, how do we know Jesus' claims are true? How do we know he's the one who is unique? How do we know he's the one who actually can make these claims? That is exactly the question that arose in the minds of the people who were listening to Jesus. You see that in verse 13. The Pharisees said to them, you're bearing witness about yourself. Your testimony is not true. So the Pharisees are questioning whether or not Jesus' claims are true. And particularly they're saying, why should we believe you when you're the one who's saying this about yourself? And that's an understandable objection. If somebody comes and makes massive claims and they're the one making those claims, you think, well, why should we believe you? How do we know what you say is true? In response to their question, Jesus gives an utterly magnificent reply.

He says, even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true because I know where I came from and where I'm going. But you do not know where I come from or where I am going.

[13 : 31] Now you might say, well, what's so magnificent about that? Well, we looked at this a year or two ago, but it's well worth looking at again. Jesus says, my testimony is true because I know where I come from and I know where I'm going. In other words, he is grounding the truth of his claim on his origin and his destiny. Origin and destiny. Where I came from, where I am going. And these two things are absolutely crucial for determining whether or not somebody's claims are true. So to give you an example, above my head are two lights that are not on. The other six are all on. These two are not on. If I say to you, 16th of February, by the end of this month, I will have these lights on. Then the truth of that claim is based on the origin of the claim and the destiny. In terms of origin, is there anything originating in me that justifies that claim, whereby I say I will have those two lights on by the end of the month? As it happens, there is an origin basis for that claim. In my former life as an engineer, I did learn some basic electrical skills so

I can wire those lights. I've wired several others in this building with the help of my expert electrician, Son Tom. So I can do it. I can do it. I know how to do it and I'm prepared to do it. My claim has a basis in its origin. But that claim will only be true if they actually come on. In other words, they'll be proved through or false by the destiny of that claim. So if in two weeks time those lights aren't on, my claim is false.

If they're on, it's true. So I have the origin, I know how to do it, and then there's the destiny if they actually do turn them on. And those two things together will confirm that my claim that these lights will be on will be true. I better do it now that I've said it. So, origin, destiny, the two must go together. It's exactly the same with Jesus.

He can make these exclusive, massive claims to be the light of the world because of his origin and because of his destiny. And that's what he talks about. So in terms of his origin, he says something utterly wonderful. He says, I've come from my father. You see that in verses 15 to 19. I won't read through it because time's rushing through. But that's the emphasis he's saying. He says, I've come from my father. My father has sent me and he bears witness about me. Now you might think, well, that's a bit convenient because surely anyone can say, you know, oh, I'm here, I'm this, I'm that, and I've come from God. And in a way, it's kind of unprovable. Many people have made those kinds of claims. But what I want is to think about this, you know, if this is true, then it's really important to consider the alternatives. If Jesus said, my testimony is true because I heard a voice one night.

My testimony is true because I had this amazing vision when I was walking in a mountain. My testimony is true because look, all these people follow me and they think that I'm the real deal. None of those claims are convincing. They're all a little bit unsettling. And they do nothing to make Jesus unique. And that's why Jesus doesn't say anything like that.

[17 : 15] Instead, he grounds his claims in the fact that he is God, the father's son. That fundamentally is who Jesus is. He is God, the son. He's been God, the son from all eternity. And now he has come to be one of us in order to save us. And the key point is this, if Jesus really is God, the son, if God, the son really has come to earth, if God, the son really has become a human, and if all the prophecies of the Old Testament really are being fulfilled in Jesus, then if we ask Jesus the question, how do we know it's true, then the one thing that I want Jesus to emphasize again and again and again is that his father has sent him.

That that is where he grounds his confidence, his identity, and his mission. Now, you might be thinking, Thomas, that's a circular argument. It's a bit like Jesus saying, my claims are true because God the Father sent me there for my claims are true. And you think, oh, that's a bit of a circular argument. And many people have made claims like that. But the key point is that it's not a circular argument because it's not just the question of origin, it's also about destiny. Jesus says, I know where I came from and I know where I am going.

And everything stands or falls on that destiny. If Jesus makes these claims to be the light of the world, if he then dies and disappears as every other historical figure and history moves on, then he's just another religious nut job who's made big claims that have come to nothing. Lots of people have made big claims about their origin and they've been completely undermined by their destiny. However, if Jesus rises from the dead, if Jesus ascends into heaven, if Jesus really does overcome the darkness of sin and death, then everything he claims is verified because he really does end up where he says he's going. His destiny confirms the truth of what he says. And that's why he can say in verse 28, when you've been lifted up the Son of Man, in other words, when crucifixion happens, then you will know that I am him, that I've done nothing on my authority but I speak just as my Father taught me. Everything in John's Gospel is pointing forwards to the cross, to Jesus' death and resurrection. And that's why Christianity stands or falls on the reality of the resurrection.

Paul speaks about that in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 14. If Christ has not been raised, then your preaching is in vain, your faith is in vain. We've got nothing. But if Jesus has been raised, then everything he says, everything he says about his origins, everything he says about his destiny is proved absolutely true. And that's the question that we all have to keep coming back to. And whether you are a Christian and you've been following Jesus for many years, whether you're maybe just at the start of your journey as a Christian, or whether you may be not quite sure where you're standing as a believer or not, whatever you are, we have to keep coming back to the reality of the resurrection. That's why we meet on a Sunday, on the first day of the week. That's why we praise and worship the risen Jesus. That's why we have hope in the face of death. That's why we are bursting with joy because of Jesus' victory over the grave. And if you are here today and you're not yet a Christian or you're not sure, this is what you have to think about. You have to think about the resurrection. And if it's true, if Jesus' claims are true, then there is nothing more important for you to think about. And there is also nothing more amazing for you to think about. Jesus died and rose again to give us hope in the face of death so that all who trust in Him can have eternal life. And in terms about thinking about this,

I've got a challenge for you. Don't think about it in here. Go down to Dalmore and stand in the cemetery.

[22 : 08] And think about it there. In the face of death, do you want hope? And that's what Jesus has come to give us.

He's come to give us hope, the hope of eternal life in the face of death. All of this is driving home the fact that in a world full of darkness, in a world full of lies and despair and confusion, Jesus is the one that we need for hope, for truth, for answer. In other words, Jesus is the light of the world. And the great promise that He gives is that whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness but have the light of life. And just for about five or six minutes, I want us just to think that through a little bit. This great contrast between following Him means that we will not walk in darkness but have the light of life. It's really important to think about this because to be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus. That involves repentance and faith. When we talk about repentance, we're talking about turning around the fact that so often we drift through life, we don't think about God, we don't think about anything really, we just do our own thing and often we end up going down various paths that are unhelpful. Repentance is turning around, changing the way that we think and instead of just wandering off in our own way, we are thinking, no, I'm going to follow Jesus. And as we turn in repentance, we trust Him in faith, not turning around thinking, okay, I'm going to fix myself,

I'm going to sort myself out, I'm going to make myself into a good person and then I'll follow Jesus. No, we turn around, we trust Jesus and it's like Jesus, you need to help me every single step of the way and that's exactly what He does. We turn from our sins, we trust in Jesus so that our sins can be washed away and then we follow Him. We follow Him in a beautiful relationship with Jesus and a beautiful relationship with every other Christian. And here Jesus is telling us that following Him takes us out of darkness and it gives us the light of life. And that contrast is very important and it's beautiful because it's describing to us the difference it makes to follow Jesus and that's a question we all need to think about, what's the point of following Jesus this week, whether it's us Christians who followed Him for years or people who are maybe not sure where you stand or maybe just starting off, what's the point of following this week, what difference does it make? Well, let's just contrast that very briefly before we finish. If we think about walking in darkness,

I think that there's three ways that we can think about that. We can think of darkness as evil and that's confronting us with the reality that there are sin in the world, there's sin in our hearts and we're all tempted to go down that path. Don't ever think that Christians are people who never ever ever think bad thoughts or feel tempted to do sins. We are tempted every day and often we fail in our resistance of that temptation. Now that reality of evil doesn't mean that everybody is desperately terrible and evil. We're all a mixture of being beautiful and broken. We're made in the image of God, we're fallen sinners. But we are attracted to stuff that's wrong. And we're all tempted in different ways and that's through whether you're a Christian or whether you become one. For some people they struggle with sexual temptation, for others it's a struggle to control their anger, for others there's a struggle with selfishness. Other people want power and control, other people maybe are tempted to be manipulative, other people are greedy. And we all battle with it. Here's a thought experiment for you. Here's a thought experiment for you. Imagine you're given the choice. Either you can have one million pounds or everyone in Lewis can have a hundred pounds each, which would be a total of about 1.8 million. Which one is fairer? Which one's more tempting? Jesus calls us away from greed, from selfishness, from arrogance, from pride, from lust, from anger, from aggression. And instead he calls us to live a life grounded on love for one another and love for God. The world is full of brokenness and evil. He's calling us away from that to walk in his light. Darkness can also be in terms of ignorance. Now I don't mean that in an offensive way, I'm not talking about stupidity or anything like that. I just mean in terms of just not knowing stuff, not realising stuff. And often we can have opinions, we can make decisions, we can walk down paths because we're not actually aware of what we're doing. And sometimes that can be because we've jumped to wrong conclusions ourselves and sometimes it can be because we're influenced by what other people tell us. I can see that in my own life, I can give you three examples from my own teenage years, three things that

I thought as a teenager. I thought the free church was terrible. I'd never been to it, but I'd had lots of people criticise it and I thought it was awful. I thought that the people in the year below me in school were all idiots, just because they were in that year, whoever they were, just idiots. And this is probably the most embarrassing one of all.

[28 : 16] I thought that the way that James Bond treated women was normal. Not that I'm James Bond, but you know what I mean. None of those things are true. They're all completely wrong and I just didn't know. I didn't know anything about the free church but I judged it. I didn't know the people in the year below me but I just judged them. And I didn't know any models about how you're supposed to treat women. You just watch films and you think, oh, that seems to be the way it's done. And so often, life, culture, people, our own hearts can lead us down paths that take us into darkness. In that darkness, Jesus brings light. He brings an ethical framework for our lives. He gives us answers to the biggest questions. He shows us that people around us, whoever they are, are precious to be loved and to be befriended.

He gives us the truth that we so desperately need. And that's why the path of discipleship is one that we're constantly learning from Him. A disciple is a follower of Jesus who is learning from Jesus all the way along. So sometimes darkness speaks of evil, sometimes it speaks of ignorance, sometimes it's just being lost. Just feeling lost. And that's maybe the one that we can relate to most of all. We're going through life, we're thinking about God, we're thinking about what's going to happen when we die, we think about church and we just feel a bit lost because we just don't know what to do. In all of these situations, Jesus is the light. He's the light that shows us what's good. He gives us a path to follow.

He's the light that shows us what really matters and He tells us everything that we need to know and He is the light that means if we follow Him, we will never, ever be lost again.

And that is what makes following Jesus so amazing. That if we follow Him, the feeling of lostness goes away because we know that we're safe in Him now and forever.

At the very end of the passage that Neil read, it said, as Jesus was saying these things, many believed in Him. I hope and pray that that's true of us all. Let's pray together.