

Light of the World

29th December 2009 (am)

Isaiah has described a time of darkness for Judah. A time when the Assyrians would do all they could to destroy them. This is why Isaiah describes them as being in distress. Isaiah talks of a time when God humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali (meaning the Northern Kingdom). These are very dark and gloomy times. It's like those bits in a film where everything has gone wrong and you get the guy walking down the street at night, it's dark and it's pouring with rain. But then there is a change, Isaiah's message starts to turn. The rain stops, and the sun begins to rise and we see the first light of a new dawn.

Isaiah describes it as a great light that brings joy and rejoicing. A light that shatters the power of oppression and with it the burdens that people carry.

How will all this happen, how does darkness turn to light?

⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.

John also talks about this light coming into the world (John 3:19) in the form of God's one and only son (John 3:16). Not only is this light for Judah but it is for everyone. We all need this light because we live in a world full of darkness.

Darkness can be a very scary thing. For some people, darkness is a real problem. There is a recognised phobia called *Nyctophobia* which is a fear of night or dark places. We can probably all understand that, most of us probably feel slightly more uncomfortable walking round in the dark than we do in daylight. The dark can make us feel unsafe and vulnerable. You don't hear of so many people that are scared of the light. There is a phobia called *Photophobia* which is said to be a fear of the light but it is actually more of a medical condition where light causes pain to the eyes. It's not really a fear of light as such. Most of us have no fear at all in the light.

It's perhaps strange then that John says people prefer darkness to light. Of course, John is talking in a spiritual sense but even so it seems strange that John should say people prefer darkness and the imagery that he uses is quite physical imagery.

You only have to pick up a newspaper or switch on your television to see what John is talking about. We live in a very dark world. And it seems that some people prefer it that way because they can hide in the dark. You could look at that physically; a lot of crime happens at night because it's easier not to be seen. Or you could look at it metaphorically; in a world full of sin, a little sin goes unnoticed. So people who want to live sinful lives welcome a more sinful world because it's easier to hide in the dark than it is in the light.

But what about the rest of us who don't want to live sinful lives but perhaps there are things in the past that we have done wrong that we don't want anyone to know

about. Or perhaps there are things that we are still struggling with. As the apostle Paul so eloquently puts it:

...I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.
(Romans 7:18-19)

For those who of us who desire to do good, we need to take note of what John says:

¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.
(John 3:17)

It's worth bearing that in mind, that God wants to bring us into the light to save us, not to condemn us.

With Jesus help, it is possible for us to live in the light rather than in darkness. Jesus said that He is the light of the world (John 8:12, 9:5) and he also said:

⁴⁶I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.
(John 12:46)

But what's so good about the light? John says that people prefer darkness to light so why should we want the light? Well let's consider another well known thing that Jesus said about himself. In fact, three things that he said about himself:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life."
(John 14:6)

It may seem strange that I'm bringing this verse in here to talk about light but all of these things tie in with Jesus being the light.

Jesus is the way – a guiding light

Think about the lights on a runway that guide a plane safely onto the tarmac. If you've ever come into land at night, you'll be glad that they are there. Without them the pilot would struggle to find the airport. But the runway lights point the way clearly.

In a similar way, Jesus is a guiding light that constantly points the way to a relationship with God, a life with God. As the song says "Hope of a life spent with you".

Jesus guides us towards that life by showing us the way. He has demonstrated to us how to live a life that pleases God. He became like us to show us the way. Again it's in the song; "the king so highly exalted, glorious in heaven, humbled himself, became poor like us". So for us to live a life that pleases God, we just have to do what Jesus did. Try to be like him, imitate him, follow him. Jesus is a guiding light.

Jesus is the truth – a revealing light

Here in London if we go out at night, the chances are we will still be able to see where we're going pretty well because of the amount of streetlights that we have. You see drivers sometimes driving along with no headlights on because they have forgotten to put them on because they can see perfectly well without them. But if you take a drive into the countryside, you will certainly need your headlights on to see where you're going.

If we tried to drive in the dark without our headlights on we would most likely have a crash. Many cars now have automatic headlights that come on when it gets dark, or when you go through a tunnel, or when you go under a bridge, or when a lorry goes past and causes a shadow...

Automatic headlights are actually very useful. It's a good thing that they come on in a tunnel. Several accidents have happened in tunnels because of the lights failing inside the tunnel and then of course, no one can see anything while they are still driving along at speed.

We don't have such problems in the light.

⁹Jesus said, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light.
(John 11:9)

Like car headlights help us to see clearly in the dark and avoid crashing, Jesus helps us to see things clearly and avoid stumbling.

When Jesus said "I am the light of the world" it is thought to be at the temple during the festival of booths at a time during the festival when four enormous lamps were lit. The lighting of these lamps is recorded by the Jewish historian Josephus who said that the light from them was so bright that a woman could see clearly enough to count grain in her kitchen at night by the light given off by these lamps. It is thought to be in this context that Jesus said "I am the light of the world". He enables people to see clearly.

Jesus is the light that shows things as they really are. He reveals the truth. Like an ultra violet light – used on bank notes to reveal if a note is the genuine article or not.

Jesus is the light that reveals the truth.

In his light we see the world as it really is. We see clearly what is really a good road to take and what leads to a dead end.

In his light we see ourselves as we really are.

- We may have a false image of ourselves (good or bad)

Jesus reveals the Father to us (“Opened my eyes, let me see, beauty that made this heart adore you).

Jesus is the life – the light that gives life

SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) – also known as “winter blues”.

You can now buy bright lights that are designed specifically to counter the affects of Seasonal Affective Disorder

Our world is a SAD world – we suffer from Spiritual Affective Disorder.

In a dark gloomy world, where there is a lack of fulfilment, Jesus is the light that can expel the gloominess and bring fulfilment – or as he put it “to give life to the full”.

- ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. (John 1:4)
- ⁹The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. (John 1:9)
- Only through Jesus is it possible to have true life, a life with God now and for ever. Only through Him is it possible to have eternal life. Only through him is it possible to be saved from the pitfalls of this dark world that ultimately will destroy us.
- Only through the cross (“I’ll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross”)
- Jesus said “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10)

So that is some of what it means for Jesus to be the light of the world. And that’s all very nice, but there is more. There’s a challenge for us to. Listen to the challenge Jesus gives us:

¹⁴**You** are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let **your** light shine before men, that they may see **your** good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.
(Matt 5:14)

We are people made in his image, people who follow Jesus. We are his disciples, his hands and feet in the world.

- We still live in a world that is lost and we need to give direction.
- We still live in a world that is confused, and a world full of pitfalls. We need to help people to see clearly.
- We still live in a world that settles for a cheap imitation of life, where image and status are what you are, when they could know what real life is, where you are accepted as you are.

We still live in a dark world and Jesus calls us to be his light. To be the light of the world. Some say the world is getting worse. Well if that’s true then it should make our job easier because lights shine brighter in the dark.