

Living in the Light - or Hiding in the Darkness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 January 2022

Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 0 0] Well, I wonder, what sort of person are you on the first warm day of the year, assuming that there is one? Perhaps some of you just have to be in the sun. Some people are like that, aren't they? On the occasional warm day in Edinburgh, the parks would be flooded with sunbathers. So much so that one year, looking down from the mound onto Princess Street Gardens, one of my fellow students at the time remarked that it looked like it had snowed for all the sun-starved pale white skin on the ground. But perhaps you're one of those who avoids the sun at all costs. You know, dark room, fan on, can't take the heat. Another friend of mine, he describes anything over 20 degrees as Saharan. That's right, like the Sahara Desert. And between

May and September, has a pair of sunglasses almost permanently fixed to his face. And lastly, there are those of us, I'll admit I'm one, he likes to think that they like the sun and wish all year around that the summer would finally get here. And yet, when it comes, sadly, find any excuse not to be out in the sunshine. But one thing that none of us are when the sun comes out is indifferent.

We all have something to say, don't we, on a nice warm day. And we find that in John chapter 7, the same is true when it comes to Jesus. When he came into the world, everyone who saw what he did, everyone who heard what he had to say, reacted in some way. In that chapter, as we read, we heard so many people say so many things, didn't we? But like the sun coming out, when God's sun came down, so many of the reactions were surprisingly negative. Jesus put it like this back in chapter 3, verse 19. This is the verdict, he says, light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light, because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be plainly seen that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. He is the light, said Jesus. He has come into the darkness of this world. But rather than stepping out of the darkness and stepping into his light, well, lots of people ran for cover.

Because he shines a light, doesn't he, on what is really hidden in the darkness, what he calls evil deeds. He uncovers our sin. And generally, as a rule, we don't like having that done. The ugly bits of us uncovered our sin, our evil seen in the light of day, that's still true for us, isn't it? It's uncomfortable. And yet some of us do and have come out of the shadows, come into the light, because, not because we have pure hearts or clean hands, not because Jesus won't find anything wrong in us, we don't pretend that, but rather because we want to live by the truth and live our lives openly in the sight of God and in the light of Jesus Christ.

And so the question John asks us tonight, as we come face to face again with Jesus, is what sort of person are ye in the light of his coming? Are you living in his light? Or are you hiding still in the darkness? Or perhaps would you love to live in the light, but still maybe have one foot in the light of his coming? Or am I living in the light of his coming? Or is it not the light of all that is? Or is it not the light of us? Or is it not the light of the light of his coming? Or is it not as we are, however we are, however we're feeling? In verse 37, let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.

[4 : 30] so firstly let's see and begin to see why Jesus does what he does in this chapter firstly we see he does it not for his own glory not for his own glory have a look with me down at verse one after this Jesus went around in Galilee he didn't want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders were looking for a way to kill him so Jesus has a good reason doesn't he for not wanting to get involved in the festival this time because people there are plotting his death remember the reason back in chapter five they wanted him dead because not only was he seen to be breaking the law but claiming to be equal with God and so Jesus knows that if he goes up to the festival this time it's not going to be glorious for him it's going to be tense and painful and difficult but then his brothers get involved as brothers do go on Jesus they say go go and get famous it's time for your big breakthrough verse four no one who wants to become a public figure act in secret so since you're doing these things show yourself to the world and humanly speaking maybe we ask well why not people think this way all the time don't they if someone came and and really did miracles well then they would obviously be world famous some people say don't they perhaps you've said it yourself you know if I saw a miracle if I saw someone heal the sick raise the dead well then I would believe well sorry to burst that bubble but when Jesus did those things that's not what happened in fact the reason people want to kill him is partly because he had done a miracle on the wrong day at healing the paralyzed man by the pool on the sabbath see what the brothers don't get about what Jesus is doing as he tells them in verse seven is this the world cannot hate you but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil so Jesus not as his brothers assume he isn't out to gain personal glory fame he didn't do what he did for his own glory but instead to uncover the evil of our hearts to shine a light into our darkness so that to see seeing our own sinfulness we would come to him for rescue and the world hated him for it as John told us back in the beginning it's true he was in the world and though the world was made through him the world did not recognize him he came to his own and his own did not receive him and so to put it this way Jesus had nothing personally to gain from coming to us in our sin what he says and what he does for us isn't for his own glory and so he doesn't have a conflict of interests he doesn't just tell us what he thinks we want to hear he's free from that kind of inner corruption he's being honest with us he tells us what he tells us because it's true glance over if you would at verse 18 where Jesus says whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth there is nothing false about him that's been Jesus claim all the way through hasn't it he's only saying and doing what

God who sent him has given him to say and do and so before we get to thinking about our response to Jesus let's recognize that what Jesus says is entirely trustworthy because he is entirely trustworthy and all that he says is true because he does what he does for God's glory and our good not his own glory or his own good so even when the truth is hard for us to hear we know that it's not because Jesus gets something out of showing us our sin or making us uncomfortable when he tells us the truth about ourselves he's doing it for our good that's why incidentally Jesus says he's not going to the festival in verse 8 and then does go to the festival in verse 10 confusing perhaps but the reason says John is he went not publicly but in secret he goes halfway through because he's not going to get famous on the big stage he is going quietly to walk among the sweaty dirty crowds to tell people the honest truth and many of them are not going to want to hear it which brings us to our second point which is what

Jesus does he uncovers the heart Jesus uncovers the heart now we need to see in this chapter that the pressure grows on Jesus during this visit conflict is brewing at the stages all set his arrival people are asking are asking are they where is Jesus if Jesus was a hashtag he would be trending in Jerusalem but it's also divided public opinion see that in verse 12 some said he's a good man others replied no he deceives the people but no one would say this openly because of the leaders he by this time were trying to kill him now the reactions by and large haven't changed that much over time have they Jesus isn't trending today so to speak but if we asked our non-christian friends or colleagues what do you think of Jesus well I reckon they would say either he was a good man he did nice things he was a massive fraud who told the world's greatest lie or I'm glad he's gone so that I can get on with my life now on the one hand you we'd like to think wouldn't we those views maybe slide from better to worse better that people think Jesus was a good man than that they wanted him dead but on the other hand I hope that you would also want to say to those friends to any of those friends that's not really true because as in Jerusalem back then not even the best of those views really gets Jesus as he truly is to be the Messiah the rescuer from God and perhaps to our surprise as Jesus draws the crowd's view of him into the open we see in reality it's not so much a spectrum of views but just two views we see as long as that collection of responses was buried in the darkness we could see it as a variety of opinions but as soon as the light shines on them it becomes clear that in fact there are only two responses of the human heart to Jesus at first the crowd are simply stunned aren't they by Jesus teaching how did this man get such learning without having been taught they asked and notice how searching Jesus answer is verse 16

Jesus answered my teaching is not my own it comes from the one who sent me anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own this is essentially what the servant said isn't it in our first reading from Isaiah the sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary he wakens me morning by morning wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed that the servant is foreshadowing speaking for Jesus there I learn from God he says so I speak from God but like the servant Jesus was to suffer for his obedience to God because if the crowd he says had chosen to do the will of God well they would have known where Jesus teaching had come from but they didn't we saw what God's will was last week at chapter 6 verse 29 to believe the one whom he is sent but the crowd didn't believe him and so they didn't get him and so they found themselves opposing him and on the wrong side of the law see that verse 19 hasn't Moses given you the law yet not one of you keeps the law devastating why are you trying to kill me he asks now murder is clearly breaking the law but they've broken the law but they've broken the law in a far bigger way back in chapter 5 verse 46 Jesus had said to them if you believe Moses you would believe me for he wrote about me so what really puts these people on the wrong side of the law it is not believing in Jesus that's what what the law is for he says to show you your sin to point you to the need of a savior well here I am says

Jesus Moses said it and yet you haven't followed the law all the way to me in fact you're trying to kill me he says they deny it don't they who's trying to kill you Jesus and yet Jesus points out the hypocrisy verse 23 you follow the law only so far he says you're happy to be circumcised on the sabbath but then I come and heal a whole person's body on the sabbath and you want me gone stop judging by mere appearances he says but judge correctly see what he's doing see what he's uncovering that their whole sense of right and wrong good and bad is twisted out of shape they thought they were following the law and yet rightly Jesus should have been praised and glorified shouldn't he for what he'd done on the sabbath but he was hunted down as a criminal because the people who thought they knew the law their hearts were set against them at this point says the crowd verse 25 oh yeah now we remember we are trying to kill you see how Jesus is uncovering this hidden hostility towards him hidden even from those in whose heart it lives friends that's how deep our sin goes isn't it we don't even see the depths of our hostility towards God and his son until Jesus shines his light into those dark dark depths of our hearts and shows us our true colors and yet we find ways to resist him don't we the crowd pretends not to hear him we know where this guy is from they say but when the real messiah comes well we won't know but you do know says Jesus verse 28 he said it a thousand times in this gospel hasn't he you know me you know where I'm from you know I'm not here on my own authority he who sent me is true you know I'm from the father he says what more can I say or do to convince you that I am from God you know these questions that perhaps a couple of chapters ago started out as a genuine desire to know him well by this point of resistance have hardened haven't they into deliberate misunderstanding it's not that they don't understand the answer to the question it's that they won't have it they won't accept it and so says Jesus verse 29 you don't know him that is God but I know him because I am from him and he sent me now I hope you're picking up how provocative Jesus is being and I hope if you're not a Christian tonight you feel that

[17 : 47] Jesus came to uncover our hearts and that is extremely uncomfortable okay anyone who's a Christian here tonight has been there too standing uncomfortably before Jesus and his words and his questions uh and really trying to figure out why why don't I trust him you know I know the reasons I tell myself but is that really why well whatever whatever the reason is friend let Jesus uncover it when his words shine that light into your heart don't bury it down deeper let him see the problems let him answer the questions we tend to get defensive don't we when someone probes into the hidden parts our inner lives but remember what we saw earlier Jesus is only telling us the truth about what is in us he has no mixed motives he's not doing it for his own glory but for our good you know perhaps you've just started coming to church and you've got loads of questions let me encourage you to keep asking them notice how many questions get asked in this chapter I had a quick count and counted 14 perhaps there are more but Jesus would warn us as we ask our questions that our hearts aren't always ready to hear the honest answers like on on ancient mariners maps

Jesus would write on our hearts here be dragons so if you want to find Jesus let me suggest that you begin the first question you ask him you begin by asking him to give you a heart that is ready to listen to him pray that when you ask the questions you'll be ready for the answers because sadly not everyone is prepared to hear the truth see that in verse 30 when Jesus said this they tried to seize him but no one laid a hand on him because his hour had not yet come still many in the crowd believed in him they said when the messiah comes will he perform more signs than this man some turn and trust in him and yet others want to kill him still and so this crowd that seemed at first maybe to hold a spectrum of views about Jesus in fact only has two responses to him belief or hostility that's what Jesus draws out into the open when we come face to face with him now perhaps that sounds really harsh or unfair but just look at what Jesus offers next and who he offers it to because thirdly we see what Jesus offers he offers the Holy Spirit verse 37 on the last and the greatest day of the festival Jesus stood and said in a loud voice let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink who ever believes in me as scripture said rivers of living water will flow from within them by this he meant the spirit on whom those who believed in him were later to receive now half this crowd have just murdered him in their hearts and the leaders want to murder him in cold blood and yet Jesus gets up on the busiest day of the festival and shouts let anyone come to me and drink anyone see he's uncovered their hearts hasn't he he knows what's in their hearts in our hearts he knows the sin and darkness and hostility that lives there yet he says to each and every one of us if you are thirsty come to me and drink if you are empty come to me and be filled you are dead come to me and have life see his generosity is beyond calculation his grace is just immense isn't it he offers people like me and you who have pushed him away time and again what we don't deserve and what only he can give the gift of eternal life

Jesus has used watery pictures before for this gift back in john 4 he said to the samaritan woman whoever drinks the water i give them will never thirst indeed the water i give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life and in the same way here jesus speaks about rivers of living water flowing from within us when we come to believe in him so these pictures are describing a source of life in us that doesn't run dry a river that runs through us forever doesn't have a beginning doesn't have an end and john tells us that life is the life of the holy spirit that when jesus died and rose from the dead and returned to his father he poured out the spirit on those who trusted in him he continues to do so and he is that living water in us perhaps sometimes we think of eternal life as being something that begins when we die maybe or when jesus comes back but john wants us to know that eternal life actually begins now from the very moment that we believe in jesus and we receive the holy spirit we have entered a new realm of eternal life there's a book written by a man with a great name henry scoogle scott henry scoogle but his book has an even better name the life of god in the soul of man the life of god in the soul of man that is what jesus is offering god's life in our souls think about that invitation think about who it is that he is inviting to receive it jesus has just peeled back the nice religious layers of these people's hearts and found a rotten core he shined light into the darkness and uncovered depths that these folks couldn't have believed were in there some of these people want him dead and to these people to me and you jesus says come and have this life come to me and drink come to me and have god the spirit live in you have life that never runs out for anyone for whoever would come and so what jesus says about us is hard to hear our sin is hard to face but he's not harsh he is unfair but only in the sense that in fairness he should have condemned us to death for our sin and yet instead in his grace he freely offers life forever with god to whoever would trust him that is unfair as one writer puts it has always been god's verdict on his people that they cannot keep the law and need rescue the remarkable thing is that jesus continues to offer to rescue anyone who would believe in him and if we take an honest look at ourselves if we know our own hearts well he would refuse to take him up on this offer finally then we see that this is the choice before each and every one of us lastly then how people respond deceit or belief on hearing these words some of the people said surely this man is the prophet others said he is the messiah still others asked how can the messiah come from galilee thus the people were divided because of jesus some wanted to seize him but no one laid a hand on him

so we've reached the great divide haven't we some of the crowd wonderfully recognize jesus at last for who he is the messiah the rescuer from god but some still don't see it he can't be they say how can he be and some wanted to arrest him there and then but even the temple guards who were sent to arrest him come back awestruck by this man don't they no one ever spoke the way this man spoke they say even his enemies can't withstand the truth of what he is saying and yet and yet they keep up their hostility and carry on in their deceit now some of them do it very religiously and biblically look verse 42 how can the messiah come from galilee doesn't scripture say that the messiah will come from david's descendants and from bethlehem to the town where david lived now you can go home and study that question in your bibles if you like but we need to know for these guys that question was only a distraction a smoke screen to keep them busy to keep them from having to actually face and grapple with jesus ultimate claim not to have come from galilee or bethlehem but to have come from god what a tragedy again it is to use the bible in this way you some of the most serious christians who have seemed to be really into their bibles have ended up falling away over the years because ultimately this is why they were studying as a cover to look good that was the done thing but ultimately as a distraction from having to answer the real questions friends don't be one of them don't be one of them if we love the bible that we will let it lead us to jesus again and again every day some of them those skip the bible study don't they and openly resist jesus the guards don't bring jesus with them and the religious rulers ask you mean he has deceived you also have any of the rulers or pharisees believed in him no that they brush past don't they all the niceties and reject jesus outright it's shocking isn't it these are religious leaders but it's so true isn't it brothers and sisters where the light shines there will be darkness also this polarizing of opinion should prepare us as jesus disciples today that when we take jesus offer an invitation out into the world sometimes people will turn it down without thinking and that feels terrible doesn't it that's hard hard to face perhaps that's what stops you from wanting to share the gospel altogether but the light of christ will sadly always send some people running back into the shadows and hiding in the darkness and yet it will always draw some out into the light and that is why we take the invitation out isn't it john gives us a lovely encouragement doesn't he in verse 50 look who speaks up for jesus it's nicodemus at the same nicodemus we're told who came to jesus in the darkness and didn't didn't get his answers the first time well now it seems that he has dropped his deceit and even questions the deceitfulness of those in leadership he's come hasn't he from the kingdom of darkness into the wonderful light of christ

and later the same nicodemus will stand in the shadow of the cross and confess he is the messiah and so this is the choice for each of us of us this evening and the question for each of us is where then are we standing you are you living this evening in the light of christ's grace with the life of god in ye or are you still hiding in the shadows being secretive in the darkness holding back your heart from christ's loving gaze his offer is for all of us whoever we are this evening that if we come to him then we might drink and have from that very moment life forever life with god life in the light of day that never ends so would you come to him and receive him this evening let's pray together for that let's pray god our father we thank you that your word is truth we thank you father that the one who speaks such truth is so good so loving so kind so gracious lord he does not hold our sins against us as he should but he freely calls us to himself with free forgiveness free grace to offer us free and eternal life and father we pray that none of us here this evening would resist that invitation we thank you father that he can do what no one else can do he can give what no one else can give the holy spirit and so we pray lord that we would go from here rejoicing for the life that you have given us in him lord remind us each day that renew your mercy to us we pray and remind us that we have this life within us if we are in christ a life that doesn't run dry or run out lord when we thirst we pray that you would bring us back to him to drink afresh lord we all need that father we pray that you would help us not to fear how people will respond or react to jesus lord we think of those whom we love and would dearly love to come to him father we pray for the confidence and the trust in you to continue to hold out that invitation lord as jesus does even when it is being turned down lord we know that only you can save and so we pray lord that by your spirit you would do this convicting work and draw lost sinners to yourself as you have lord for us and these things we ask in jesus name amen you