

The Light of the World

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I don't know if perhaps you're feeling a little bit out of breath, but if you've been following us in our series through John's Gospel, perhaps you've noticed that John has really picked up the pace in the last few chapters. Last year, when we looked at chapters one to four, mostly we had short, sharp signs, conversations, points. Chapters five, six, seven, eight have been big, long chapters, haven't they? Lots of talking. And chapters nine, ten, and eleven are going to be more of the same. So this is a good point just to press pause, get our breath back a little bit, and see how far we've come. So far in this Gospel, we have seen five signs that Jesus has done. And this chapter brings us to our sixth. So Jesus has turned water into wine. Jesus has brought a young boy back from the point of death. Jesus has healed a paralyzed man. Jesus has turned five loaves and two small fishes into a feast to feed more than 5,000 people. And Jesus has walked across the sea on the water. And those signs are so important to this Gospel that some commentators sometimes call chapters two to eleven the book of signs. These signs are right at the heart of what John has to tell us. Because we've seen how those miracles Jesus did, or signs, as John calls them, are there to point us to the truth about Jesus. The water turned into wine showed us that Jesus is here as God's king to bring God's everlasting kingdom. The raising of the young boy shows us that Jesus is the one who can give life with just a word, just like God did in the beginning.

The healing of the paralytic shows us Jesus is the one who brings true Sabbath rest, wholeness, completeness, true and lasting peace, as God also did in the beginning.

And multiplying the loaves of bread and walking on the water shows us Jesus is here to rescue his people from slavery and death as God did in the Exodus. So, overall, where do these signs point?

Jesus' signs tell us that he is God himself here in the flesh to rescue us from our slavery to sin and give me an everlasting life. And this sixth sign, it points in the same direction and it works in the same way. It points us to the truth about Jesus and specifically the truth that he put so clearly in the second of his I am sayings. We've heard Jesus tell us lots of times, haven't we? Who he is, what he offers us.

I am the bread of life, he said. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. I am the light of the world, he said. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light of life. And where we finished last Sunday, before Abraham was, I am, I am. And if you glance down at verse 5 in our passage, chapter 9, the sixth sign, the healing of the man born blind, it's there to underline that second saying, isn't it?

[3 : 4 0] While I am in the world, says Jesus, I am the light of the world. So, we're going to spend some time seeing what Jesus meant by that. But the main twist here in this chapter, something we've not seen before in John's gospel, is that for those who walk in his light, who believe in him, well, we can say something similar of ourselves. Jesus can say, I am the light of the world, but he can also say to us when we follow him, you are the light of the world. Not in completely the same way, of course. But we'll see as we go on that if we follow Jesus, the world will see us the same way that it saw him, the true light that came so long ago.

So, getting into our passage then, firstly, what does Jesus mean by saying that he is the light of the world? Well, we see here firstly that it means he can give sight to the spiritually blind.

We know, don't we, that light is how we see things. Light shines on stuff, and that light reflects into our eyes and our brains, kind of interpret those light signals, and make images. So, two reasons why we might not see something clearly are that there isn't enough light, it's dark, or that our eyes are not working properly. And the question that John is asking us is, for which reason do people not see Jesus clearly? Now, the four gospel writers, John loves particularly to take ordinary physical things in life and use them to explain spiritual things. So, John loved it, for example, when Jesus took something as ordinary as bread. Probably most of us have eaten bread today at some point still, 2,000 years after this gospel was written. Something so ordinary every day, John loved it when Jesus took that and said, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to him and feeds on him will never go hungry ever. And there are lots of pictures like that in this gospel. It's really helpful for us, isn't it, to have a kind of foothold or a leg up into spiritual things that we'd struggle to grasp otherwise. And the healing of the man born blind works in just the same way. When Jesus said, I am the light of the world, you know, we're not to think that his skin shone or that he had a halo of light around his head or anything like that. No, he's saying he is how we see things rightly. He sheds light on our darkness. If we say we're in the dark about something, we mean that we don't know about it. Well, Jesus has come as a light to save us from living in the dark about ultimate things. God, eternity, life, death, supremely himself, God's son.

So why doesn't everyone see those things clearly, rightly? Well, remember those two reasons. It's not because there isn't enough light, is it? Jesus says, I am the light of the world. He gives light to everyone. No, it's the second reason. It's because there is a problem, spiritually speaking, with our eyes. We are born blind to those ultimate realities. And what this sign shows us, though, is that not even that, not even our blindness can stop Jesus, the light of the world, showing us the truth so that even we can see it. But that claim is hollow, isn't it? If Jesus can't show us that's true, and that's why this sign is here, this miracle. Look with me down at verse one. Jesus went along, and he saw a man blind from birth. Now, perhaps you have experience with blindness yourself. Maybe you know somebody who suffers from blindness. I confess I don't. And I was surprised to learn this week that 2,000 years on from the time of Jesus, blindness from birth is still basically incurable. One professional body has this on their website.

The common treatments for congenital blindness, being born blind, involve teaching children with those conditions to live as a blind person. That's pretty sobering, isn't it? In an age, particularly, where we think we can fix anything, well, here is something that can't be fixed.

[8 : 39] They're beginning to trial gene therapy, which they hope will be able to give partial sight. But 99.9% of people who have been born blind have never seen anything. And yet, yet 2,000 years ago, Jesus met a man who was born with no capacity to see. He was born blind, and simply with mud and water and a word gave him perfect sight. The man went and washed and came home seeing. It is a miracle. Now, perhaps if you're skeptical about whether that really happened or not, well, no, you're not the first person to question.

Now, the people there at the time were doubtful, weren't they, that it really was the same man? Could they believe what they were seeing? Some claimed he was the same man, verse 9. Others said, no, he only looks like him. Two things tell us he was the same man. Firstly, verse 9, he himself insisted, I am the man.

And he had no reason to lie about that, did he? Soon, he was going to get disowned by his family and kicked out of his community for that claim. And secondly, the people who have known him longest, the guy's mum and dad, they also say, we know he is our son, and he was born blind. New people back then were not kind of more gullible and more trusting than us. They knew that blind people did not just start seeing things. In fact, verse 32, the man says himself, nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. Still true today, isn't it? So if this wasn't a real healing backed up by evidence that people actually saw, well, the story would have died there and then, wouldn't it? Jesus would have been exposed as a fraud. But the evidence tells us that he actually really did it, that it is a powerful miracle. So what does it tell us about Jesus that he gave sight to a man born blind? Well, it's here to tell us that he can do it for us. For many of us, that he has done it for us. And not, of course, that we don't have to go to the optician or get our eyes tested or wear glasses, but that he opens the eyes of our hearts. That is a miracle. The Bible tells us soberingly that we are blind from birth to the things of God. David writes in Psalm 51, behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me? That sinful condition, notice, isn't because he sinned or his mom sinned? That's what the disciples want to know, isn't it? Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? No, says Jesus. Neither. Our spiritual blindness isn't caused by our personal sin or the sin of one or two generations before us. It is caused, rather, by the first human sin, the fall. Some people find this incredibly unfair, that we should have to suffer the consequences of Adam's sin. But Adam carried all humanity in him. We all come from him, and he sinned as our family head. So we might say he brought a curse on the family, the whole human family. Our sin is a hereditary condition. And so our spiritual blindness isn't something that we can fix by ourselves. We can't fix it with learning and education, technological progress, new laws, political policies, fighting wars, working for peace. We cannot cure ourselves of our blindness. But Jesus can. Only Jesus can. He is the light of the world.

And he doesn't just shine in the darkness, hoping that people will see him. He opens our eyes for the first time, so that we can see him as he truly is, to see the light of the world.

And so John wants you to know, simply, if you're a Christian, that is ultimately why you're a Christian. Maybe we thought a wee bit this morning, if you were here with us, about the suffering that a Christian might have to go through for following Christ. We'll see that again with this man in a moment. But John wants us to know, if we're following Jesus, it's not because we made a wrong turn.

[13 : 45] It wasn't a poor judgment or a wrong decision. We're following Jesus because he has opened our once blind eyes. Not because you prayed a prayer, not because you were raised this way, not by accident, but by his power and grace, he has given you eyes to see him truly.

That is his work. And if he has done that for us, he will keep our eyes open and on him for as long as we live. I'm sure of this, says Paul, that he who began a good work in you will see it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. And if you're not yet following Jesus, John wants you to know that this is where it starts. Perhaps you don't feel that you know enough yet to follow Jesus, or perhaps you're still waiting for it to kind of feel right, like the right time. But there's no amount of learning or waiting or feeling that we can do to cure our spiritual blindness. It's not going to get better on its own. Time does not help this situation. Only Jesus can open blind eyes. He is the doctor that you need to see. Believe that he can do it. Ask him to do it for you. Don't wait. He doesn't have a waiting list.

If you've been waiting for years, it's not because his door has been closed. His door is always open. And it's open now. Go and see him. And ask him to give you eyes to see him as he is.

And as you do so, prepare for the consequences of having your eyes opened. Because next we see that after opening our eyes, Jesus sends us out into spiritual darkness. Now what happens to this guy who moments ago was blind and now miraculously can see? Well, we start to see that because Jesus has given him his sight, because he walks in the light, now he is treated like Jesus. I wonder if you noticed that in lots of ways. John has taken the same conversation that we've heard happen in chapters 7 and 8. And he's put it in chapter 9, but he's just swapped out Jesus for this follower of Jesus.

Okay, so if you've got a Bible open, follow this with me. Verse 9, the crowd disagrees about whether the man really is who he says he is. Verse 16, the Pharisees say, this man is not from God because he does not keep the Sabbath. And verse 18, they still did not believe that the man is who he says he is. Then verse 22, notice they call witnesses but don't believe what the witnesses tell them.

[16:56] Verse 24, they have made up their minds already about the man before they have even given him a hearing. We know, they say, this man is a sinner. Verse 27, the man tells the Pharisees, I have told you already and you did not listen.

Verse 34, the Pharisees get angry with him and want to get rid of him. I wonder if any of that rang a bell if you've been here for the last two Sunday evenings. Is that not the self-same conversation that Jesus has had with the Pharisees for the last two chapters of this gospel? Some of what the man said could have come straight from the mouth of Jesus, couldn't it?

I've told you already and you didn't listen. I don't know about you, I've never seen that in this gospel before. It really excited me. Friends, the Bible is never finished with us, is it?

You could read it for a lifetime and it will still throw up surprises, still new things. Now, the Pharisees are still angry with Jesus primarily, aren't they? But now, notice it's the man whose eyes Jesus has opened who is taking the heat for that. Jesus is nowhere to be seen, just this guy. And so what's the point that John is making? It's that those who follow Jesus in this world will be treated like Jesus by the world. Those who follow Jesus in this world will be treated like Jesus by the world. What's new for us here is that it's not Jesus getting interrogated, being misunderstood, being rejected, is it? But it's this man whose eyes have been opened to see Jesus.

Jesus. So John is saying, as it was with him, so it will be with us. We're learning this too from fresh Peter, aren't we? Let me say I didn't plan for this to happen on this particular Sunday. It's just how the books of the Bible break up. But it suggests for us, doesn't it, that God still has something to teach us about this. He still has something to teach me about this. Let me read for you what the great teacher Jesus says later in John chapter 15.

[19:18] He says, if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. In short, as they treated me, says Jesus, so they will treat you.

And that's because of who we are now, isn't it? I am the light of the world, says Jesus, John 8, verse 12. You are the light of the world, says Jesus, Matthew 5, verse 14.

He is the light. We reflect his light. Notice the man doing that here. All the man does in this whole chapter is testify to who Jesus is and what he has done for him. All he does is reflect that light, isn't it? Look with me again. Verse 11, the man replied, the man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. I went and washed and then I could see. Verse 15, he put mud on my eyes, the man replied, and I washed and now I see. Verse 25, he replied, whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know, I was blind, now I see. Verse 27, he answered, I told you already and you didn't listen. Verse 31, we know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing. Every time this guy opens his mouth now, his words point to one person, don't they? All this guy does now is reflect the light of the world in the world. He is ready, isn't he, to give a reason for the hope that he has. But we see just as the Pharisees ran for cover from the true light of the true light of Jesus. So now they clench their eyes shut when he is reflected in the words of an ordinary Christian person who has been saved. Friends, if Jesus has opened our blind eyes, he now sends us out into spiritual darkness to shine as lights for him in the world.

That is life for us now. That's where we are. That's who we are. That's what we're for. And that will be hard and costly as it was for Jesus, as it was for this man. But we have a simple task. And that is to witness to the life-changing power of Jesus Christ.

That is what he sends us out to do, isn't it? Notice that detail. Where does the man come from? In verse 7. The pool of Siloam. And you don't need to be an Aramaic expert to know that it means sent. John tells us sent. And that word is at the very heart of Jesus' identity in this gospel, isn't it? Sent. We love the I am sayings, and rightly so. But far more often, Jesus identifies himself as the one the Father has sent. I counted 24 times up to this point in the gospel. He says, the Father sent me. Sent, but not generally received. And so now this man is sent.

[23 : 21] And not received. Later in this gospel, chapter 20, verse 21, Jesus will say to all his disciples, as the Father has sent me, so now I am sending ye. Like father, like son, like son, like disciples.

Brothers and sisters, like Jesus, like you and me. As he was sent, so we are sent. We are sent into spiritual darkness to shine as lights where his light is often not welcome.

We call to shine that light, come what may. Sometimes, as with this man, that will be rejected completely. But we finish with an encouragement. Because finally, as long as we are living for him, Jesus sticks by us, giving his spiritual light. See that? Have a look down at verse 35.

Jesus heard that they'd thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, do you believe in the Son of Man? Now, it's really strange in this gospel that Jesus has been absent for almost this whole chapter. He's not made an appearance. This guy has been interrogated, hasn't he? Insulted, rejected by his community, by his family. But now Jesus comes back into the picture, and notice why he comes back into the picture. Jesus heard that he'd been thrown out, and Jesus came to find him. Does Jesus care when we suffer for him?

We know, don't we, he seeks and saves the lost, but does he ever stop seeking and finding us when we live as lights in a dark world? No, he doesn't. He never stops finding us when we suffer for him.

[25 : 30] Friends, you can lose your home, you can lose your family, you can lose your friends, you can lose your job, you can lose your community, but Jesus can't lose you. Jesus can't and won't lose you.

He sticks by us while we live in the darkness of the world and continues to shed his light on us. We've seen this guy, his eyes opened for the first time. We've seen his understanding, his faith grow, and now as if to prove that Jesus' work is always, always more than an outward miracle, a physical healing. He asks, doesn't he, do you believe in the Son of Man?

Who is he? asked the man. Jesus replied, brilliant, isn't it? Verse 37, you have now seen him. You have seen him. Physically, yeah, spiritually, yes. His eyes are open to Jesus. Then the man said, Lord, I believe and worshiped him. The lights have come on, haven't they, for this guy?

And the result is witness, we saw before, and now worship. If you were here this morning, it's almost as if Peter had been there. You couldn't make it up, could you? Friends, Jesus does not leave us to face the world alone. And if we trust him, if we believe in him, then we worship him for that. And so coming to a close then, what have we learned? Well, verse 37, I think, acts as a kind of summary statement for the whole chapter, even the whole last few chapters that we've seen.

Jesus said, for judgment I have come into the world so that the blind will see, and those who see will become blind. That's exactly what John is showing us, isn't it? That when Jesus came, those who were blind to God began to see. The first disciples, Nathanael, and Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the centurion, the later disciples. But that those who claimed to see God rightly, well, they turned out in the end to be blind. The Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, the teachers of the law, the same light can enlighten us and blind us. That's what Jesus says he does.

[27 : 58] And so the question he leaves with us, I suppose, is when we look at him, what do we see? Do we see him as he truly is? And I suppose that the really pointy end of this chapter is for those who would look at Jesus and say that they were enlightened, but without needing to believe in him.

And that includes, of course, isn't it, people who follow other religions that offer any kind of enlightenment apart from Jesus? But it also includes anyone who thinks, I get God. I've got this sorted. I'm fine where I am. But doesn't follow Jesus.

Jesus is an uncomfortable Messiah, isn't he? He doesn't stop asking the questions. He doesn't let us go on thinking that we're okay until we are okay because we are with him.

The Pharisees begin to pick up on that, don't they? Some of them heard him and said, what, are we blind to? And in some ways, Jesus' answer is even harder than a simple yes.

Verse 41 tells us, Jesus said, if you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin. But now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. So if you're not a Christian, or even if you would call yourself a Christian, and claim to be right with God, but have not committed your life to Jesus, well, this is extremely challenging, but it's entirely true.

[29 : 37] That without coming to Jesus, you are not right with God. And as Jesus says, right now, your guilt remains. And so if that is ye, Jesus would say to you again tonight, his offer still stands, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but have the light of life. Whoever follows me, he holds himself out to each of us this evening.

So come to him, come into the light, come and ask him to open your eyes, to see him for who he is, to give you a heart that believes in him for the forgiveness of your sins, and for eternal life.

Let's join together in prayer for that now. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. God, our Father, Jesus' words are so challenging.

Lord, your word indeed cuts us open to the heart and shows us what is really in there. And Father, we confess that we are not always ready to see what is in us.

[30 : 57] But we pray, Lord, that you would grant each of us here this evening eyes to see Jesus, to recognize him as the Messiah, the one sent from ye, the light of the world.

Lord, we praise you for the generosity and grace of his offer. Lord, that however long we have lived, however long we have rejected him, Jesus comes to us and says, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

So, Father, we pray, give each of us a heart to take Jesus up on that offer this evening. We pray that especially, Father, for those this evening who as yet do not know you and trust you, and that by your spirit you would open their blind eyes to see the light of Christ.

Lord, for those of us who do walk with him, we pray that you would keep our eyes open and fixed upon him. Lord, we know that we cannot take one step in the darkness of this world apart from the light of Christ.

Lord, keep us shining, we pray. Lord, keep our witness clear. Lord, keep us worshiping Jesus as the one who has opened our eyes and can open blind eyes.

[32 : 17] And we pray, dear Father, that he would continue to do so in the lives that we know and love around us. We pray in his great name. Amen.