

Jesus – The Light of the World

I'd like to start this morning by telling you about my first encounter with an amazing woman who has truly brought **light** into my life. It all started up the road at a place called Bethlehem Tertiary Institute. BTI. Just over ten years ago I enrolled in the Bachelor of Counselling Course there. It was my first day of classes, I entered the lecture room and took my seat. I saw this woman enter the class room and come up to the side of the room where I was sitting. I was instantly attracted to her and I thought "Please come and sit beside me." She came up to the row that I was sitting and I thought "Yes, this is awesome!" And then she went and sat in the row in front of me. "Bummer," I thought! You know when you have those moments in life that you're thinking "Wow, this is a make or break opportunity"? Well, this was one of them for me. I thought I'm going to introduce myself to her and see what happens. But I chickened out and couldn't work up the courage to do so. But then something incredible happened. She turned around and introduced herself to me by saying "Hello, I'm Roxy."

That was the beginning of an incredible adventure of dating, marriage, kids, mortgage, ministry, holidays, endless washing, stacks of dishes, friendship, and love and **light**.

We've been on the adventure for over ten years now and even though it hasn't all been smooth sailing, it's been one amazing ride that started with those words, "Hello, I'm Roxy."

Here at OBC we've also been on a bit of an adventure over the previous ten Sundays and we've encountered this man in the gospel of John who also introduces himself to us by saying, "Hello, I'm Jesus."

(SLIDE 1)

We've been looking at his life and asking the question, "Who are you?" And from focusing on the answers of who He says He is, who His followers say He is, and who His critics say He is - we've seen so far on this adventure that Jesus divided people around him.

Some believed Him to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and chose to follow Him; whereas others believed Him to be completely mad, a blasphemer of God, and chose to deny Him and wanted to kill Him.

There are many people critical of Jesus today as well and would be happy if this religion called Christianity didn't exist. They would like the message of Jesus to be dead and buried.

Say what you like about Jesus, but He never minced His words and He made no mistake about telling people around Him who He truly is.

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus makes these large sweeping statements about Himself that are connected to the culture of His day.

For instance during the Jewish Passover Festival, which has a big part to do with God providing His people with bread (manna) from heaven, He declares to all the people there:

(SLIDE 2)

“I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

This is the first of seven I AM statements that Jesus makes in John’s gospel about His divine identity and purpose. Today we’re going to look at the second of these, in John chapter 8 verses 12 to 20. Before we head there, let’s briefly set the context for this part of Jesus’ life.

You may recall a few weeks ago that we examined the Feast of Tabernacles, which was one of three Festivals that the people of Israel went up to Jerusalem during the year to honour God and thank Him for His protection in their lives.

At this Feast of Tabernacles, ‘Water’ was very important to the Israelites as God provided water for their ancestors while they were wandering in the desert.

You may also recall that it was on the last and most important day of the Festival when Jesus declared:

(SLIDE 3)

“Whoever is thirsty should come to me and drink. As the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in me, streams of life-giving water will pour out from his (her) heart.’”

This divided the people – some were for Him and some were against Him.

Last week Brian carried on the story with the woman caught in adultery. Now this is like an interlude for this part of Jesus’ life. The early manuscripts of the New Testament do not include this passage here, but some scholar’s place it in others parts of John or Luke’s gospel. So that means what comes directly after it has to follow on from what came directly before it. This means that regarding our text today, we can have confidence that Jesus is still at the Festival of Tabernacles, and that makes sense because what He declares about Himself fits around another large theme about this Festival – which is ‘light’.

So let’s pick up the story in chapter 8, starting at verse 12:

(SLIDE 4)

Jesus spoke to the Pharisees again. “I am the light of the world,” he said. “Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness.”

The Pharisees said to him, “Now you are testifying on your own behalf; what you say proves nothing.”

“No,” Jesus answered, “even though I do testify on my own behalf, what I say is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going.

(SLIDE 5)

You do not know where I came from or where I am going. You make judgments in a purely human way; I pass judgment on no one. But if I were to do so, my judgment would be true, because I am not alone in this; the Father who sent me is with me.

It is written in your Law that when two witnesses agree, what they say is true. I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me also testifies on my behalf.”

(SLIDE 6)

“Where is your father?” they asked him.

“You know neither me nor my Father,” Jesus answered. “If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”

Jesus said all this as he taught in the Temple, in the room where the offering boxes were placed. And no one arrested him, because his hour had not come.

So Jesus is in the Temple teaching and He makes this massive striking revelation:

(SLIDE 7)

I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness. This morning we’re going to focus predominantly on this one verse.

So what can we say about Jesus being the light of the world and why should this matter two thousand years later? There are three main points I want to make this morning.

First, Jesus is the light who illuminates God.

Second, Jesus is the light who illuminates our lives.

And third, Jesus is the light who illuminates the darkness.

(SLIDE 8)

So first point, Jesus is the light who illuminates God.

Jesus is making Himself known; He is revealing Himself to the people. He is saying, “I am the light of the world.”

(SLIDE 9)

This was a big deal during the Festival of Tabernacles, because as I’ve mentioned, “light” was another major part of it. For instance there were sixteen golden bowls (reached by ladders) that were filled with oil, and when they were lit at night, the rabbis of the day have said that all Jerusalem was illuminated.

Now back then, after dusk there was no public lighting, so seeing this light shining from Jerusalem’s yellow limestone walls must have been a pretty spectacular sight indeed.

This light shone for all to see. And it was also symbolic of the Israelites wandering through the desert period when God used a pillar of fire as light that guided them for many years. This would have been foremost in their minds when they saw the spectacular light show!

And Jesus breaks in on this and declares that He is not only the light of Jerusalem, but the light of the entire world! I imagine that caused quite a commotion.

Now ‘Light’ is very important in John’s gospel and John wants us to know this. In the very first chapter this is what John writes, starting in verse four, through to verse nine:

(SLIDE 10)

The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to mankind. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out. God sent his messenger, a man named John, who came to tell people about the light, so that all should hear the message and believe. He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light. This was the real light – the light that comes into the world and shines on all mankind.

John talks about the Word, Jesus, as the One who brings light to all people. This light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out. Then he talks about another John – John the Baptist – who came to bear witness or to illuminate the light for others. Light that comes into the world and shines on all people.

John sets the stage for Jesus declaring that He is this light.

Now, light is invisible. Without going into it too much, we only know of the existence of light by the manifestation of it through the mists and in the dust of the atmosphere. This is how we realize that light exists. God is also invisible but he made himself visible by taking human form and we can know or realise that God exists because He shines – or has manifested Himself – through the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the one who illuminates the world for people to see God, His Father. As Jesus says in chapter 8 verse 19: "If you knew me, you would know my Father also."

In other words, if you have seen me, you've seen my Father too. To glimpse the Son is to glimpse the Father. Jesus came to make his Father seen and known. Jesus came to reveal God to the world. And all throughout his life Jesus illuminated God.

(SLIDE 11)

Second point, Jesus is the light who illuminates our lives.

"I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will have the light of life ..."

(SLIDE 12)

There is the story of a little boy walking with his father along a country lane one dark night, carrying a lantern. The black silence all around him frightened the little boy. He said, "Father, this light reaches such a little way, I am afraid." His father answered, "True, my son, but if you walk on, the light will shine to the end of your journey."

We are all that little boy at certain times in our lives. Our heavenly Father is guiding us through His son Jesus, the light of the world, but we can't always see what is up ahead and we don't always know why we go through the bends in the road, the hard times, in our lives.

But Jesus came to illuminate our lives. He came to set us free, He came to illuminate our minds to the truth of who He is. And when we know that truth, when we come face to face with Him, nothing is the same again.

I remember coming face to face with Jesus in my early twenties. I had been doing my own thing for quite a while and pretty much had turned my back on God. I had come away with the false truth that following God was based on my feelings and if I felt good that meant that God was happy with me, but if I felt bad that meant that God was not happy with me. I was not very happy at this point in my life and I thought that if that was God I didn't want much to do with Him.

I was in a dark place. My sister at the time had brought a book that she wanted my brother to read. And somehow I got hold of it and ended up reading it. I really related to one of the characters in the book. He wasn't a Christian, but he was sort of open to God, and yet really doubted his existence in his life. In the book this character was in a dark place as well and he was about to enter a potentially life-threatening situation. He knew enough about God that He could pray to Him for protection. So he did. He asked for help. And God answered Him – and also me – in way that was totally unexpected.

God spoke directly to this character and said, "I am with you, I've always been with you, and I'll always be with you."

God spoke the exact same words to me. And I simply knew He was there, that He'd always been there, and that He would always be there.

That was the turning point for me. That was when I got on my knees, gave everything over to God, and really started following Him.

Jesus the light illuminated my life. He showed up and He has never left since.

But like the little boy walking with his father, there are night times in the Christian's experience when God gives His followers just enough light to take the next step. Perhaps that is all that is needed. We may be sure of one thing, however —the light will never go out. If we walk on, it will shine to the end of the journey.

(SLIDE 13)

Third point, Jesus is the light who illuminates the darkness.

I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will have the light of life *and will never walk in darkness.*

(SLIDE 14)

We all know the darkness. We see it on the news every day. We see it in child abuse and poverty. We see it in human trafficking. We see it in murder. We see it in ethnic genocide. We see it in countries arming themselves with nuclear weapons.

And if we're honest, we see it in ourselves too.

When we have bad thoughts about someone; when we desire something that is not ours; when we steal something that does not belong to us;

when we know the good we ought to be doing but don't do it; when we lust after people or things. We're familiar with the darkness.

Light not only reveals that which is hidden in darkness, but it also provides energy needed for the giving and sustaining of life. When the earth was dark and void God provided light. This light not only provided physical energy for the development of all life, including human beings, but it also provided spiritual direction, ultimately through the person of Jesus Christ.

The message that Jesus Christ brings to this world is one that can bring light to the darkness of any heart. It is the Good News about the truth of God's love that is capable of overcoming any obstacle, no matter how dark.

God's light, shining through Jesus, pierces the darkness and breaks through. In our world and in our lives.

And some people get it, while others miss it.

Film-maker Woody Allen quipped, "I'm afraid of the dark and suspicious of the light."

We have no reason to be suspicious of the light. As John later writes in another of his books: **(SLIDE 15)**

Now the message that we have heard from his Son and announce is this: God is light, and there is no darkness at all in him. If, then, we say that we have fellowship with him, yet at the same time live in the darkness, we are lying both in our words and in our actions. But if we live in the light—just as he is in the light—then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin. (1 John 1:5-7)

Jesus the light illuminates the darkness. We are called to live in the light and let our light shine for others to see Him. **But where is our light hanging out?**

A young girl was shivering her way along a main street in a big city. Seeing the beautiful lights of a church building and hearing the music coming from within, she went in and warmed herself as she listened. The preacher's text was, "I am the light of the world." (Funny that!) At the close of the service, she went to the minister and asked him, "Did you say you are the light of the world, sir?" The minister replied, "No, dear child. Christ is the light of the world, and I am one of the lights." The little girl looked at him for a moment, and then solemnly said, "Well, sir, I wish you would come down and hang out in our alley, 'cause it's awful dark down there!"

(SLIDE 16)

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus says this:

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither 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. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

Christians are, indeed, as Jesus says, "the light of the world." As one of those lights, are you "hanging out" in some dark alley?

Jesus didn't say to be cursers of darkness, but be the light of the world - light in dark places.

Do you know that there is not enough darkness in all the world to put out the light of even one small candle? That candle will continue burning and lighting the darkness.

Jesus is the light who illuminates the darkness.

And the darkest place that He went to was the Cross.

(SLIDE 17)

God endured the sin or wrongdoing of all mankind by allowing his Son Jesus to die on that cross. God's light is shed upon the darkness of all sin, allowing people the opportunity to escape the dark grip of sin in exchange for the light of His love.

And the light seemed to have faded at one point. Jesus cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When Jesus died, the earth shook, the curtain in the temple split in two, and the light faded even more.

(SLIDE 18)

But there was yet still a flicker. Still a flame burning. And that flame became a fire once again. Because as we believe, Jesus didn't stay dead, He rose again.

(SLIDE 19)

And today, Jesus is still the light who illuminates God, our lives, and the darkness.

Wherever you find yourself this morning and however dark your circumstances might be, just as Jesus declared in the Temple back then, He declares in your life this morning that "I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness."

And just as the darkness has never been able to put out the light or extinguish it, no candle loses any of its light when it lights another. Our role is to be candle lighters for others. Let our light shine before people so that they will see Christ. Let our lives illuminate His love, His truth and His forgiveness.

As the music team comes forward, when Roxy and I set sail on our adventure together ten years ago we prayed a prayer together. The prayer was simple and the prayer was this. 'Lord, use us to shine your light.'

Now, we don't always get it right, and we're not always shining the brightest light, but ten years later that is still our same prayer. Lord, use us to shine your light.

(SLIDE 20)

Jesus is that light - the light of the world. He illuminates God, our lives, and the darkness.

Lord Jesus, May you use us to shine your light in the world. Amen.