

The Light of the World

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. It's good to see you. Last week, we said that if you give Jesus a fair hearing, he'll tell you about God and eternal life. He said this last week.

He said, amidst the noise and the hostility, he said this, whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. The living water was the Holy Spirit. If you give Jesus a fair hearing and believe in him, God will live in you by his spirit. The spirit will be like an endless spring of fresh water. Eternal life is the spirit. That is a big claim, isn't it? In fact, that is the claim of Christianity. Believe in Jesus and you will have eternal life. John, our gospel writer, he wrote this gospel around that one claim. And you can see it actually just on our title screen. In fact, he says, but these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing you will have life, eternal life in his name. But here is a good question.

How do you know? How do you know? It's a great claim, but how do you know? How do you know that with Jesus, you're on God's side and you'll get eternal life? Because down the road is a mosque and they're saying exactly the same thing. If you believe the claims of Muhammad, you'll have eternal life with Allah. How do they know? What about the Buddhists and the Hindus? They make competing claims about ultimate reality. How do they know? What about all the other religious people in Melbourne, especially all the Christian denominations? There's lots of us, all of whom say this, well, to me, our God is like this and to you, your God is like that. How do they know?

And what about the atheists? Their worldview can best be summarized by famous cosmologist Carl Sagan. Sagan parodies the Bible's idea that God is all that is or ever was or ever will be. Sagan says the cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be. How do Sagan and the atheists know? How do you know is the right question? And let me illustrate why. I want you to imagine that this room inside here, where we are, this room is the cosmos. That is, that's all there is. Let's pretend that these windows and the doors don't exist. They're all just sort of black. And that inside this room is, as Sagan claims, all that is, ever was or ever will be. Now, inside this room or this cosmos, we can speak to one another, we can live our lives, have families. But then suddenly we become really sophisticated and we invent things like a way to measure time. Wow, pretty good. We all have wristwatches. And then one day, guy, Manuel over there, he picks up a pen and he drops it because he's fallen asleep in my talk. And he drops the pen. No, he's good. He drops the pen. And then with his wristwatch, he goes, ah, I realise every time I drop this pen, it falls at 9.8 metres per second squared. And thus we have an understanding of gravity. Then Andre over there, pretty clever bloke,

Andre invents a machine that can look at particles. And Andre realises, wow, in the air, there's this many parts oxygen, this many parts nitrogen. And therefore, we need oxygen and, I was going to say nitrogen to breathe, but I'm not a scientist. Right, we need oxygen to breathe.

[4 : 0 1] And then Andre puts some water under there and goes, oh, wow, two parts hydrogen, one part oxygen, H₂O. And now we've got physics and chemistry and biology. John and Marsali over there, they're sitting next to one another, they always do. But suddenly they start, suddenly they start fighting.

And now we've got theories about sociology and the like. Marsali hits John and then we have to treat him and now we've got medicine. Do you see how this is working? All very well inside the room.

But then the people on this side here, clever bloke, people here, clever people, they start wondering things. They say, why are we here? Why are we in this room? How did we get here?

What happens when we die? Is there life outside? Is there an outside? And we all have a go at these existential sorts of things. We call it religion. Now all the people over there, they're all the atheists.

Sorry. And all the people over here, they say to everyone else, you're all crazy. The room is all that is, ever was, ever will be. And the truth is this, right? When it comes to God, your guess is as good as mine in the room. Because how do we know? Then what happens is one day we're all enjoying life in the room and there's a knock on the door. And we all go, wow, there's a door? And a person enters.

[5 : 36] And this person starts bending and breaking our regularly observed laws of physics and chemistry and biology. And when this person speaks, he tells us all about God and his plans for us, why we're here and what happens when we die in the room. That person has a unique knowledge the rest of us just don't have access to. They have a unique revelation. The only way we could know about any of those things outside the room is if someone broke in and told us and revealed to us.

That is another unique claim of Christianity. John puts it like this in chapter one, verse one. I think it's a slide, Gwyneth. There it is, right at the top. In the beginning was the Word.

And the Word was with God and the Word was God. You see, Jesus is the Word from God. He words God to us. What God is like, what God's plans are, what God wants from us and how we can have eternal relationship or eternal life with God. John says in the second paragraph, the Word became flesh.

Jesus became a man and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, came into the room from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And again, he says the same thing. Verse 18, no one has ever seen God. No one has ever gone outside the room. But the one and only Son who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father has made him known, has broken into the room and revealed him to us. How do Christians know about God? John says the Son who's in closest relationship with the Father has made him known. And so our subject today is revelation.

[7 : 37] Or in other words, how we can know when it comes to God. You see, last week Jesus says, if you believe in me, God will live inside you, the Holy Spirit. And this week the Pharisees, who are professional God studiers, devout religious people, they challenge him. How do you know is their challenge? And so today our passage is Jesus' defense. In fact, this is a Christian's defense when we go outside to the marketplace of competing claims about God. The author's aim is to give us total confidence, total confidence that when it comes to Jesus' claims about God, we can know for sure, we can be certain. Confidence, certainty. That's our aim today.

For the atheists here today, and there'll be a few, or people from other religions, you will have to come up with a better, how do you know, than this one we're going to see. So point number one in your handouts, and please keep John chapter eight open. Verse 12. When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. You'll remember that Jesus is at the festival of tabernacles. And on the last day of the festival, what they used to do was they'd bring all these fires into the temple and light up the temple in the night sky. And the point was to commemorate when God lit up the night sky with a pillar of fire. Remember back in Exodus when he rescued Israel from Egypt. And Jesus stands up against that backdrop and says, I am the light of the world. Light here is about revelation from God, knowledge from God. It's the answer to the how do you know question. Because Jesus is the light.

He is the revelation from outside the room. And it's not just that Jesus reveals things about God. It's that Jesus reveals God. He is God. He says, I am the light of the world. In Exodus, God's name for himself was I am. Jesus says, I am God. I am the light of the world. See, we need Jesus to enlighten us. And the reason why is because verse 12 has a very hard teaching in it. Can you see it in verse 12? See, when it comes to God and spiritual matters, everyone walks in darkness. That is ignorance. Knowledge of God is not a God given or a human right that we're entitled to. Man, woman, children, everyone is born into darkness. That is ignorance when it comes to God. Our judgment is flawed. Our knowledge is impaired. Our liberty restricted.

We're only human. We cannot step outside this room. We are bound to this room. The Russians had to go to try and break out of the room in 1961. Am I allowed to ask you? Remember that in 1961? We've turned into fascists here about age, haven't we? Over 50 and stuff. Anyway, in 1961, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, who was the first man in space, he came back from the first mission and he said this, I went up into space, but I didn't see God anywhere.

You see, they thought that God was some being in space and if you fly up high enough in a rocket ship, you'll find him and get to learn about him. They didn't realise, verse 12, we are in the dark.

[11 : 38] Unless we accept the light or the revelation that comes from Jesus, unless we believe in him, we'll remain in the dark when it comes to God and be in the dark when it comes to eternal life.

We'll be like all the other religions in Melbourne, all of whom are in a total muddle about how to approach God or we'll be like the atheists who think this room is all that is, ever was, or ever will be. The truth from Jesus is hard to hear, especially for our culture because we're so enlightened, aren't we, in our culture. The Bible says, actually, no, we're in the dark when it comes to God. The religious Jews back then, they were very devout people. They loved Moses and the law, but they refused to accept that it all pointed to Jesus and so they began to challenge him. How do you know is their challenge? This is point two. You can see from the handout, they challenged Jesus three times and we won't spend much time working through each particular challenge and the reason why is each of their challenges is quite absurd and born out of ignorance. There's lots of emphasis in this passage, in our reading today, about how in the dark and how ignorant these people are. So please, Gwyneth, could I have the next slide? I've underlined, these are all the times Jesus gives them the idea that they're in the dark. So it's hard to see from here, but you have no idea. You're judged by human standards. Do you not know me or the Father? If you knew me, the bottom one, will he kill himself?

That's an ignorant question. Next slide, please. Again, all the underlined bits, is Jesus emphasis for how ignorant the religious teachers are. And thank you, Gwyneth. You see, what they're really asking Jesus is, how do you know? You come up with these great big claims about God. How do you know? And so the first challenge is a legal one, verse 13. Here you are appearing as your own witness.

Your testimony is not valid. You see, according to their law, all testimony needed two witnesses to be legally valid. Jesus says in verse 14, even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid. Why? For I know where I came from and where I'm going. I wonder, has anyone here ever met Andrew Price's father, Cliff? He's not here that often. If you blink, you'll miss him, but he does turn up every now and then. Imagine we in this room, we're all wondering what Cliff was like. And Andrew Price says, well, I'm his son. I've come from him. I lived with him my whole life. I can tell you perfectly what my father is like. To challenge the validity of Andrew's testimony would be absurd.

Look where he comes from. He comes from his father. And that's how the Pharisees are challenging Jesus. What's more, they're using Old Testament laws to challenge him. If they read the Old Testament carefully, they'd realize that it points to Jesus. But they're showing how in the dark they are, how ignorant about God they are. Graciously, though, Jesus agrees to jump through their hoops.

[15:12] End of verse 16. He says, I'm not alone. I stand with the father who sent me. In your own law, it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself. My other witness is the father who sent me. You want two witnesses? I'll give you two. Me and the father.

Twice he says he was sent by the father. In verse 18, another I am statement. God the father corroborates the testimony of God the son as if he needed to. That's the first challenge. The second challenge is authority and heritage. Verse 19, where is your father? You do not know me or my father, Jesus replied. If you knew me, you would know my father also. I think it's a very tragic thing, isn't it, for religious Jews like the Pharisees to spend their whole lives studying God's word, the Old Testament, yet be unable to recognize or to know the father. You don't know me.

You don't know the father. It's very sad given their background. They didn't know God when he was standing right in front of them. They're in the dark, you see. And in verse 21, Jesus warns why that is so dangerous. This is why being in the dark with God is so dangerous. Verse 21, once more Jesus said to them, I'm going away and you will look for me and you will die in your sin.

Where I go, you cannot come. Verse 23, you are from below. I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins. If you did not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins. Very strong language. Did you hear the repetition there?

Die in your sins. For the people of Melbourne, the religious Jews there, no matter what religion or worldview they follow, if they reject Jesus, the warning is they will die in their sins.

[17:18] However clever people are, however successful, however liberated they feel, however religious, however enlightened they claim to be, if none of that causes them to believe in Jesus, the warning is they will die in their sins. And rather than enjoy eternal relationship with God, in verse 21, Jesus says, where I go, you cannot come.

What people really need is the light, don't they? Jesus says, I am the light of the whole world. A light to the Gentiles, as we heard in our first reading.

I am the light of the whole world. Whoever, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Jesus' offer, his enlightenment is for the world, for whoever, whoever, if they would just believe. But who are you, is their third challenge.

Verse 25. Just what I've been telling you from the beginning. I think he's quite exasperated here. I've much to say in judgment of you, but he who sent me is trustworthy. And what I've heard from him, I tell the world. You see, for all their knowledge and Jewish heritage, they couldn't hear God when Jesus spoke. John summarizes them in verse 27.

They did not understand. They're in the dark. They did not understand he was telling them about his father. And how could they? They twisted their Old Testaments into man-made religion.

[19 : 01] Verse 26 tells us that Jesus is not man-made religion, but God-given revelation. He who sent me is trustworthy. He who sent me is trustworthy. What I have heard from him, I tell the world.

Jesus is the revelation. You see, everyone has a go at the truth. All religions claim to have a word from God.

But unless God breaks into the room, we're all in the dark. And so your truth is as good as mine. This is where Jesus stands alone. Jesus doesn't claim to have a word from God like other religions.

He claims to be the word. And the word was with God. And the word was God. Jesus' revelation is a different quality to all others.

See, we're all down here jostling and competing for truth. But Jesus claims to have come from the Father. From outside, outside the room, come in.

[20 : 12] And he gives us the evidence in our last point. Verse 28. So Jesus says, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know.

Then you'll know that I am he. That I do nothing on my own, but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone.

For I always do what pleases me, pleases him. The lifted up language. He's talking about the cross. You can see that at the cross, at the cross, there's a huge concentration of Father and Son together language.

Just look at it. He says in verse 28, I do nothing on my own. I speak just what the Father has taught me. Verse 29. At the cross, the one who sent Jesus is with him.

He's not left him alone. Jesus is pleasing him obediently by giving his life. See, Jesus says, Nothing reveals more to the world about what God is like than the death of his Son on the cross.

[21 : 24] See, at the cross, we see all of God's love and all of God's justice. He forgives people. He punishes sin. We see all of his mercy and all of his grace as Jesus dies for the sins that we deserve, for our sins.

His salvation, his judgment, the peak of his plans in the room are at the cross. When I was in Israel just recently, I was speaking to a minister there from Queensland.

This minister runs a number of churches. And she said she doesn't believe that God is a punishing, angry God. He's only love all the time. And I thought, really?

What do you... Then why does Jesus have to die? We didn't get around to talking about it. But what kind of God do they worship? What kind of God are they teaching about? You see, anyone who comes to you who claims to know something about God, are their claims consistent with what we see at the cross?

If not, it is ignorance. In a world of competing claims, how do you know is the right question. We have to weigh up the quality of the revelation.

[22 : 43] We have to decide if it's the truth we want to believe, to live by, to die by. Do we want to follow the teaching of the Pharisees or the Catholics or Muhammad or Buddha or the Hindu gods?

How good is their revelation when it comes to God and life outside the room? How do they know? Do you want to follow the ideals of the 1960s liberation?

It says you are free. There are no consequences. How do they know? Or do you want to be certain? Because you believe in Jesus, who is from God above, outside the room, whose death can not only save you from your sin, but also ends the argument about what God is like.

The church I used to work at in London, the main teacher there, Dick Lucas, he said this. In Jesus, you don't just have a watertight argument. You have a watertight person in the end against whom there can be no good argument.

Shall we pray? Our Father God, we are in the dark. And so we thank you that you broke into our room in the person of Jesus.

[24 : 02] Thank you that we don't have to guess what you are like, that he perfectly reveals to us, to people who deserve to die in their sins. We're so grateful that you would enlighten us, that you would want to get to know us, that you want us to know you.

And we thank you for the cross, where we see all of your love and justice and mercy and kindness. We thank you that Jesus would die for us.

In his name. Amen.