

Last week at our 9am service we began a short series looking at the first 14 verses of John 1.

We looked at the first four verses. There we saw that John gave us an understanding of Jesus as God through the use of the expression “the word”. We saw from those verses that Jesus is a. eternal b. a separate person from the Father c. fully God d. creator e. Life giver and through that Light bearer. Now John continues the theme of light and shows Jesus as the true light of the world.

1. Light and dark v5

If we go back to Genesis and the creation of the world we see God saying “let there be light” and light happens and darkness was dispelled. Here we see Jesus the word as God’s light shining in the darkness of the world which has not understood or overcome that light.

In Genesis the reference is to light in creation and therefore to very physical light – the sun and so on. However in John 1:4 and especially here the reference is more to the light that brings re-creation. As it is Christmas we are familiar with the reading from Isaiah 9. Isaiah 9:2 says “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” God’s people are living their lives in the dark because 8:17 “I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob”. They were cut off from God by their sin and facing death but the prophet spoke of coming hope. He spoke of it in the prophetic past tense as if it had already happened but was looking forward to that day when the light would come and people who until then were in darkness would see it. That day John tells us has now come in Jesus. The light has come and shines in the darkness.

However the darkness clearly is not at ease with that light for John continues, “but the darkness has not understood it” or perhaps better overcome it. John had seen first hand the effect of the light of God coming into a dark world and that world, as is made clearer later in the chapter, rather than embrace the light had acted against the light. It is the picture of God coming into a world at odds with him, in rebellion against him. So the image John raises is not the homecoming of the soldier into the arms of his family but him stepping out of the camp into enemy territory.

However, because of his nature and power as God, that hostile dark world in rebellion against him was not able to stop or overcome or defeat the light despite its worst efforts.

The whole of John’s gospel is a testimony to that fact and, while the aim of the gospel is to help people to believe in Jesus, this verse is an encouragement to believers because as we seek to live and share the light of Christ we too find the opposition of the darkness in different ways.

We see only too often how Muslim nations seek to repress Christians and to stop the light spreading but John reminds us that is not possible, “in this dark world the light still shines”.

But then even in this country we see if not opposition and indifference to the light of Christ. Some of us who were involved in the nativity trail event were reminded of this by the number of people who when we said we were from the church and offered them a leaflet of services coldly rejected the offer.

However, John reminds his readers and us that when the light shines in the dark while the dark may not accept the light it cannot overcome it. This should encourage us as we move towards Discover next year. Yes there will perhaps be many who will not be interested in the faith we offer to them but the light the Kingdom of God still moves forward it cannot be stopped.

2. Witness to the light v6-8

John's move from the light shining in the darkness to John the Baptist may seem odd. However, here we see the human witness to Jesus as the light of the world. John the Baptist bore human witness to Jesus as the light. He was the one whom God sent to point people to Jesus as 'the lamb of God'. He was sent to help people see who Jesus is. This was his God given role to bear human testimony to Jesus as God.

I was in Basel in the summer and came upon a viewing spot where there was an information plaque. Being in Switzerland it was an impressive plaque, very carefully crafted and very elegant but its importance was it helped you understand what you were seeing across the Rhine in the city. John the Baptist looked impressive in his life and ministry but his importance lay in his witness to Jesus. John had a unique role and that was to signify that the one long promised, the Messiah had come. He did it in a very specific way by calling people to repent and to be baptised. They needed to repent John said because the "kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt 3:2). John stirred people up to be prepared for the coming Messiah. He bore witness to Jesus.

This is our role in our own day to bear witness to Jesus as God – the light of the world.

In doing that we are a sort of cross between the London blue badge guides and the Olympic Games makers.

You may be familiar with the London blue badge guides. They are people with a very good knowledge of London who are able to take people round and show them the sights but with an understanding and insight to help people understand what they are seeing. The games makers were people who were incredibly cheerful, helpful to the extreme and had such a positive desire to make people's experience of the games a good one.

We may not think of ourselves knowledgeable about Jesus in the way that the guides know about London, and yet I think many of us know more about our faith than we give ourselves credit for. However we can all be like the games makers as we seek to help people discover Jesus. We can be positive and cheerful and as we seek to point people to Jesus to make their experience of finding him a good one.

A mix of knowledge and enthusiasm as we, like John the Baptist, point people to Jesus.

3. True light v9

However, John points out that while John the Baptist was important but he was not the light. It is Jesus who is the true light as he is the true bread (6:32) and the true Vine (15:1). He is true in the sense of genuine – he is God and brings God's truth into the world. If we wish to know the truth about God, the world and ourselves it is to Jesus we must look and to him we must listen. As the

true light he gives light to every man. Yes we may see in and through other people flickers of light, glimmerings of truth, some glimpses of insight about God but in Jesus we see the full objective revelation of God come into the world.

One of the great differences I experienced when I moved from Central London to Oxfordshire was that fact that in Cassington, the smaller village I was Vicar of there were not street lights. So whereas in London people turned up to church council with MacDonald's bags, having come straight from work in Cassington they turned up with a torch! It was very dark as you walked through Cassington at night. You would get an occasional glimmer of light from house, perhaps some vague light from the moon and the occasional burst of light as a car came passed. But by and large it was dark until the sun came up. The people were literally walking in darkness. In the past the light to point people to God was dim. There was the general light of creation – a bit like moonlight. There was the light of the law of God a bit light the glimmer of light from houses. The burst of light from each of the prophets like the burst of light from a car. But by and large as Isaiah said "the people (are) walking in darkness". However no it is as if the sun has come and they and we "have seen a great light".

Jesus is the true light the objective revelation of God which has come into the world.

I hope that is true for all of us here this morning and for those of you listening on download that the light of Christ has dawned in you hearts and minds and that what Paul said to the Ephesians is true of you "For once you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord" (Eph 5:8). Please if you have not yet received Jesus as your light then take time this Christmas to read a gospel and reflect on the one who came as the true light. If you have received the light then do as Paul encouraged the Ephesians "Live as children of light" (Eph 5:8)

4. The great rejection v10-11

I have to say that I think these two verses are probably among that saddest in the Bible. The creator entered creation and the world didn't know who he was!!

More than that for the next verse makes the situation even bleaker. He came to his own, surely a reference to the Jewish nation and they didn't recognise him and so didn't accept him. Here was his own people, a people, who were looking for and longing for a messiah and yet when he came they didn't recognise him, didn't know him and so couldn't accept him.

Standing at Heathrow last Sunday I was pretty confident that I would recognise my son even though I hadn't seen him for a long time. But of course there were plenty of people waiting there expectant to meet someone and having no idea who the person was and not able to recognise them.

What John is showing here is that God has revealed himself in Jesus and in so doing divides humanity.

On Sunday evening at the Carol Service using this verse I asked the question are we moths or bats. That is does the light attract us or do we retreat from it. As follow through John we see that some are drawn to the light, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (1:12). However many retreat from the light, "This is the verdict:

Light has come into the world, but men 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 his deeds will be exposed.” (John 3:19-20)

In Jesus God’s presence and light has come into the world and demands a reaction from us. So as I did last Sunday evening I ask those here and those listening to this on download are you a moth or a bat?

The light has come that we might truly see God in Jesus and, as we were reminded last Sunday at our 9am service when we looked at the opening verses of John 1, “these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31). John’s purpose in writing the gospel was that people would recognise Jesus as the true light and through him find eternal life.

It has often been said to me that I look very good – in the dark! What John is saying here is that the light has come and helps us to see ourselves as we really are and that is sinners who need God’s forgiveness and that that forgiveness can be found in the baby born in Bethlehem who died on a cross that we might be forgiven and restored as children of God. In him is our salvation.

The true light was coming into the world. This is the incarnation – God became man in Bethlehem that we might see and know God, that we might bear witness to God in Jesus and that, through him, all may have the opportunity to be saved let’s not miss that opportunity by failing to understand him (v5), to recognise him (v10) or receive him (v11).