



"I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD"

Here's a riddle for you: What am I? I am a form of electro-magnetic radiation, I am composed of 3 primary colours (and a spectrum of others), I am able to penetrate water to a depth of 240 feet, I can travel faster than a speeding bullet (at 186,282 mps), and I am essential for all life on earth to exist (in fact, without me the earth would be nothing more than a piece of floating space-rock. If that).

What am I? No, not Captain Marvel. I am *light*.

Now when we talk about 'light', we might think a list of facts, like those I just mentioned. Or we might think examples: sun, moon, stars, flashlights, light bulbs, fire, fireflies, rainbows, matches, fireworks, lamps, lasers, etc. Then again, we might think of light as a metaphor: for life or hope or joy or goodness. Similarly, 'darkness' can refer to any situation where there is an absence of light, but it can also represent other things: death and fear and sorrow and wickedness – all things negative.

All of which lights a path (*ahem*) to today's Scripture:

John 8:12-20

Over Lent this year, we're thinking about the "I am" statements Jesus made, each of which was a way of Him saying, "I am God", but was also a description of the kind of life He offers those who follow Him. And here we have another one of those statements:

Ani 'or ha'olam. "I am the light of the world."

What exactly does Jesus mean by that? And why did the Pharisees get so worked up about it?

A clue is in the location. Jesus was standing in a part of the Temple where the offerings were given – the Court of the Women. In this court were 4 colossal lampstands or menorahs, which were lit at the feast of *Sukkot* / Tabernacles. These lamps represented the light of God's presence, extending to the 4 points of the compass.

I.e. Jesus is saying, "I am the light of God Himself, to the world." And then He says, "Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Breaking it down, that means that in Jesus ...

1) We See God As He Is. In the Bible, God makes Himself known to us in various ways: in the world He has created, and in the commands He has given (Psalm 19). But most importantly, He makes Himself known in Jesus - because when we look at Jesus, we're looking at God. His love, His mercy, His grace, His justice, His humility, etc.

In fact, Jesus makes it clear, both in vs19 and elsewhere, that without Him, it is impossible to really know God. We might know something *about* Him, but that doesn't mean we actually *know* Him, personally. But as we put our trust in Jesus, we begin to understand what God is really like.

And understandably, this matters. A lot. But not just for our relationship with our Creator.

With ourselves and others, too.

2) We See Us As We Are. Look in the mirror in the dark, what can you see? Not much, right? But look in the mirror in the *daytime*, it's a different story. What can you see? Everything! Hair that needs brushing, make-up that needs applying, face that needs shaving / beard that needs trimming, nose that needs blowing, etc.

Similarly, when Jesus shines into our lives, we begin to realise, not how messed up we *look*, but how messed up we *are*. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

But Jesus also helps us to realise that God loves us – enough He was willing to live with us and die for us – and has the power to change us, too. And not only us.

3) We See Others As They Are. How is it possible to understand another person? By listening to them, yes. But also by looking at them. Psychologists tell us that so much of what we pick up from people is in their facial expressions and body language. Try doing that in the dark or with your eyes closed – it's much more difficult.

But with Jesus, we are enabled to see not only us as *we* are, but others as *they* are. As sinners, yes, but also as God's kids, loved as we are loved. And

that should affect the whole way in which we treat people. Hence Paul's command to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Colossians 3:12).

Why? Because in Jesus, that is how God has treated *us*.

4) We See Life As It Is. Sometimes life can be messy, complicated and downright difficult. But in Jesus we know that whatever life throws at us, that is not the end of the story. We have a future that the world does not have – a friendship with God that will outlast everything else.

How do we know? Because Jesus has gone ahead of us.

When Jesus was born, God Himself was stepping into our darkness, just as the OT said He would (Isaiah 60:1-3). And He took all that darkness onto Himself on the cross – all of our sin and shame (hence those 3 hours of darkness).

But 3 days later, He said goodbye to the darkness of the tomb. And we know that one day we will say goodbye to our own darkneses, too.

Whatever they may be.

Let Your Light Shine ...

Now not only does Jesus refer to Himself as 'the light of the world', He also says it of us (Matthew 5:14-16). Like a city on a hill or a lamp in a house, we have a light that cannot and should not be hidden. But a city and a lamp are not lights in or of themselves: they need oil and wick – and flame – to enable them to fulfil that role.

It's like the scene from my favourite of the *Harry Potter* books, *Prisoner of Azkaban*. Harry goes back in time to save himself and his friends, and they're surrounded by Dementors, the guards of Azkaban Prison (and a clever picture of depression and anxiety, too). What does he do? He uses a *Patronus* Charm, which taps into all that is good and produces light as a result – and the Dementors are repelled.

In the same way, when we're going through dark times or someone else is, we need to tap into something far brighter and warmer than ourselves. We need to tap into Jesus, the brightest, warmest light of them all.

With this in mind, let's pray these words together:

*Jesus, light of the world,
May Your light shine into my life,
And help me to shine that light into other people's lives, too.
Amen.*