

On the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles we have seen that the two main themes which the Gospel of John wants to bring forward for us are Jesus as the Giver of water and also as the Light of the World. It is the second of these themes that is developed in this study.

The light of life 1.4,9

We saw last study, in an introductory way, the statement of Jesus as the light of the world being developed. We saw the way that the light was the light of life. That what is being communicated and brought to us through Jesus is the life of God. Pre-eminently it will be the revelation of what is taking place between the Father and the Son. Upon its entry into the world it is a life which is characterised and expressed as light in respect of the darkness of the world.

Because it is the light of life entering into a world which God has made, a world which has become dark in the sense of those who make up the world of men and women are alienated from God. This light as it comes into the world has its affect on all men and women - "enlightens every man"[1.9] - there is no one who is not affected by it. Just what this twofold affect is as follows.

The grace of God manifest through the responses of men and women to the light in the darkness

As we saw in chapter 3.19-21 it reveals, by its coming "into the world" among men and women those who practise evil and those who practise the truth. So, from the perspective of the sending Father Jesus is sent into the world not to judge it but to save the world. Yet, from the perspective of the aftermath of His coming, there has opened up within men and women a great divide; it is a divide made clear depending upon their reception or flight from the light. We saw in that section of 3.19-21 that the light exposes evil for what it is; and it also shows what God is doing, it shows that the works of God are being expressed in men and women who come to the light. This is the nature of grace at work; those who come to the light manifest something, that their deeds are wrought or worked in God. Their response to the light is a result of a drawing by God and they could not acknowledge that light unaided.

So it is a light which the darkness does not "comprehend", nor can "overcome", to take the two main meanings of the word translated so in 1.5.

The followers of Jesus do not walk in darkness but have the light of life 8.12

There is a relationship which has been established between Jesus, who is the light of life, and his disciples, those who are attached to Him. They do not walk [live out their life] in the darkness and the reason is because of the light of life which they have. So it is the life which constitutes their freedom from living in the darkness.

What we have here is a mixed metaphor which leads us to understand the clarity to walk and the freedom from the surrounding darkness arises from the impartation of the life of Jesus to them. The affect of that life they share, whether we think of it alongside them or within them, as we see later in the Gospel, is that it takes the sphere of their living out of the realm of darkness [Colossians 1.13]. There is a different rule on their life and practice.

Working the works of God in the daytime; a daytime derived from presence of the light 9.3-5

Now we are introduced to a “work” of God which will be done because the light of the world is still with them for a little longer.

1-2 A man blind from birth. The fact that he has been blind, not by some accident after being born, but has come into the world that way sets the direction of the Pharisee's question. [Luke 13.1-5 has already addressed the Pharisees' teaching of the greater sinners suffer the worst sort of punishment in this life, along the lines of Job's “comforters”.

Jesus sees that the question seeks to understand the situation of the man by looking to his past, or that of his parents. Jesus answers to the effect that any man's predicament, whatever it is, is an opportunity to display the redemptive works of God. He asks not where the man came from, but what is a man but a creature who may be display the glory of God. And yet, if marred may display the redemptive work of God even in his loss and brokenness. This tells us that, unlike the Pharisees' question which seeks and answer as to whom to blame for the condition which confronts them, Jesus is speaking of the current action of God which is bringing about the opportunity for the change and remedy of such brokenness among men and women.

4-5 So He drives on to the mixed metaphor of ideas.

[1] We must work the works of the Father who sent the Son; this is the commission in front of us

[2] We can only work in the daytime, that is the time when all country workmen are best able to work, not in the dark.

[3] When the night comes, this is a signal for the work to be ceasing; that is when activity stops.

[4] The Son of God is in the world present as a daytime light before the impending darkness.

[5] This Son of God is a light of the world as long as He is in it. Jesus' own presence is a window of opportunity to work the works of God

6-7 Jesus sets about a sign as a “work” of God. It consists in an application of a salve to the man's eyes and a word of instruction to obey. As the word is spoken, hope would rise and the man is taken to Siloam to wash.

8-34 The healing of the man will be the sign, the “work” of God done on him. But there is another “work” which is done in him; and the pressure of the world will be required to bring that to manifestation. We need to follow it carefully.

[1] [8-9] The verification of the miracle and the identity of the man established by eyewitnesses who knew him before.

[2] [10-12] A question of method answered as a recitation of the deed and instructions of Jesus. The man does not know where Jesus is.

[3] [13-17] The enquiry of the matter by the Pharisees.

[4] [18-34] The enquiry of the Jews. The expulsion of the man from the synagogue fellowship.

35-38 The “work” of God – is that the man comes to know the Son of Man for who He is. He is brought to worship – the proper response of a creature redeemed.

39-41 The judgment of the light – it can release from blindness, it can bring about a cementing of blindness. The word to the Pharisees concerns the connection between blindness and sin. For them to have been blind and to know it would have been a manifestation of their ignorance, but forgivable. To be confident that they are sighted people about kingdom matters, and sighted by their own ability; this is the manifestation of their sin being there, remaining with them.

The blind man is released from his birth defect concerning which people had judged him. He who was surely blind and knew it has come to see; in the natural and also in the spiritual reality of Jesus the Son of Man. The men who were so sure of their own righteousness that they saw clearly about spiritual things, so as to test and verify the source of the healing of the man with the experience, find that they are sinners; who are not called because they think of themselves as righteous and sighted. Their sin remains undealt with by the Son of Man who came to save His people from their sins. Their deeds are not worked in God.

Men stumble if they do not have the light in them 11.9-10

In the context of the anxious question from the disciples about Jesus' intention to go up to Jerusalem when people are openly seeking his life He answers them.

People do not stumble in the daylight, and there is an appointed time of daylight, it is twelve hours. Jesus has an appointed duration of time also to do His work - they will not take Him until the hour comes when they may.

People who do not stumble do not because they see the light of this world. The disciples should not be disturbed or anxious because they will not fall over as they know who He is and what He means for the world.

And even in the darkness, when it comes, they will still not stumble, for if the presence of Jesu is removed, they will have the light in them, not simply with them.

To believe in the light is the way to become sons of light 12.34-36

As Jesus' public ministry was drawing to a close, He spoke of the little while they had left to consider their response to Him. They should use the time of His presence to walk while they have the light, because there is a time coming when it will be night [13.20] and the darkness has its hour of ascendancy. He is warning the Israel that He came to save that the darkness can overtake them. And if it does they will be walking in the darkness and not knowing where they are going.

He states that the response required is to believe in the light, for this will lead to becoming sons of light. This takes us some way further than before – we are now seeing a development of not just the judging, discriminating among men which the light brings into a dark world, but now we see the possibility of becoming like Jesus, where sons of light has the sense of sons of the prophets, that is a likeness such as disciples have to a master. In this way they will share his mission and do as He does.

Jesus came to save, so it is important not to reject Him or His words. 12.44-50

To believe in the light who came [the Son] is to believe in the Father [who sent the Son]. Jesus came as light into the world that the one who believes in Him would not remain in the darkness.

To judge the world was not Jesus immediate reason for coming; it was to save the world. We are drawn back to the statement of 3.15ff which is from the perspective of the Father.

But, to reject Jesus, and not to receive His sayings, is to be judged by that same word on the last day which was rejected today.

The reason is that the words Jesus spoke was not His own but the Father's who commanded Him what to speak [as a prophetic Son]. And for the Son, the commandment of the Father who sent Him is eternal life. It is the life that they share from the perspective of the obeying Son.