

John 8:12 I am the light of the world

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A couple of years back,  
our family visited Sovereign Hill.  
We did an optional night tour,  
where they introduce you  
to some of the more spooky things that happen on the goldfields.  
You get to visit the undertakers  
and see how they built coffins on the goldfields.  
They talk to you about the people who were buried alive  
and how the coffins were all fitted with bells after that,  
so that if you weren't really dead,  
you could ring the bell and they would let you out.  
They take you to a room where a Spiritist does some magic.  
There was a lot of occulty sort of stuff going on in the goldfields.  
But what the tour is missing is some good old fashioned darkness.  
Because of occupational health and safety,  
they have to keep things reasonably well lit.  
It's done in a muted sort of way.  
It still feels like you are out in the dark.  
But they enough light to make sure  
people aren't tripping over and suing them.  
Darkness.  
In a world pre electricity,  
it was a terrifying thing.  
If your candle went out,  
then you had this pitch blackness where you just could not see a thing.  
You were in danger from everything around you.  
A tree branch might whack you in the head.  
A pothole in the road might make you break your leg.  
And that's the context where Jesus says,

"I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,  
but will have the light of life."

Our context is a bit different from that.

The teenagers at SUFM loved hanging out after dark.

There's something a bit exotic and edgy about being out late  
and in the dark.

But for them, with no streetlights, torches or electricity,  
it's not exotic or edgy.

It's just plain dangerous.

It's to be avoided if at all possible.

"I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,  
but will have the light of life."

What does it mean for Jesus to be the light of the world?

1. It means that Christians won't walk in darkness.

If you were here last week,

you'll remember that I said a Christian is someone who follows Jesus.

So here Jesus says, 'whoever follows me'.

He's talking about us, Christians.

And he says we won't walk in darkness.

Which when you consider the ancient world

and what it meant to walk in darkness,

is very reassuring.

But we know that it's a metaphor.

A very reassuring metaphor, but a metaphor none the less.

So what does it mean that Christians won't walk in darkness?

In the Bible there are two options.

Option one is judgement.

When Jesus died on the cross,

the whole land turned to darkness for three hours.  
That was a sign of judgement.  
Jesus on the cross was soaking up the judgement  
that was rightly due for the sins of the world.  
The judgement of God the Father was being poured out.  
That's why they call it Good Friday,  
because the judgement of God  
was being worn by Jesus instead of you and me.  
That's such good news.  
"Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness."  
Christians won't live their lives under God's judgement.  
Jesus has taken the judgement so that you don't have to.  
It's incredibly good news.

Option number two is ignorance.  
In his letter to the Romans,  
Paul is talking about the ignorance of those  
who substitute worship of God for worship of something else.  
Rom 1:21 "For although they knew God,  
they neither glorified him as God  
nor gave thanks to him,  
but in their thinking became futile  
and their foolish hearts were darkened."  
Darkness in this passage is ignorance.  
But it's not ignorance like I am ignorant about dressmaking  
and you might be ignorant about chess openings.  
It's ignorance of God.  
As people worshipped images of stone and wood.  
As they worship their careers, holidays, physical appearance or hobbies,  
their knowledge of God evaporates.  
And their ignorance is blameworthy.  
No one is going to blame you if you are ignorant of origami.

But if you are ignorant of the road rules,  
the police officer will hold you accountable.  
You are under an obligation to know them.  
Knowledge of God is like that.  
God holds us accountable for knowing him.  
The knowledge of God is readily available.  
You can see his glory in creation.  
And everyone can see creation.  
No one has an excuse.  
You can read about his mighty acts in history in the Bible.  
Not everyone has access to that knowledge,  
but most people do.  
So if we are ignorant,  
we will be held accountable.

And you can see from my description  
that judgement and ignorance and not separate manifestation of darkness.  
Ignorance is blameworthy.  
Judgement is outcome of ignorance of God.  
But Jesus is the light of the world.  
Those who follow him will not walk in darkness.  
That is, Christians will avoid ignorance of God and God's judgement.

I want to say something by way of application of this.  
Jesus' application for the people in John's gospel  
was pretty straight forward.  
I am the light of the world,  
whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,  
so please follow me!  
But we already follow Jesus.  
How else does his being the light of the world impact us?

The first thing I want to say is that evangelism matters.  
Jesus says that he is 'the light of the world'.  
He doesn't say that he is 'a light of the world', a pretty good light,  
in fact brighter than all the other lights.  
He says he is the light of the world.  
The sort of light he gives can be found nowhere else.  
There's no other way of avoiding ignorance of God.  
There's no other way of avoiding God's judgement.  
There's no other way of avoiding walking in darkness.  
As the apostle Peter put it in Acts,  
Acts 4:12 "Salvation is found in no one else,  
for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind  
by which we must be saved."  
How do people get saved?  
Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations".  
Evangelism is Jesus' chosen method  
to move people out of darkness and into his light.

Some people might have wondered why I give people chocolate  
when they bring a friend along to church  
who hasn't been before.  
But I don't for example dish out chocolate  
to people who cook a lovely meal for a fundraising dinner  
or who get the bread and wine ready for communion  
or put up shade sails in the playground.  
They are all wonderful things to do.  
Why does one attract chocolate?  
The reason is because evangelism matters.  
And it's very hard to encourage a culture of evangelism.  
As soon as you talk about evangelism,  
Christian defence mechanisms spring into action.

Sometimes people react  
against unhelpful models of evangelism that they have seen.  
The Jehovah's witnesses would be exhibit A.  
Going about evangelism in a way  
that is completely ineffective  
at actually seeing people move from darkness to light  
is not a great advertisement.  
But why not look at Billy Graham, or John Dickson  
or indeed Sam Chan for a model of evangelism.  
I'm reading Sam's book,  
"How to talk about Jesus  
without being 'that' guy" at the moment.  
Sam has some really helpful advice,  
like if you want your friends to come to church with you,  
you need to be prepared to go with them when they invite you somewhere.  
Or if you have a social event like a BBQ,  
invite your Christian friends and your non Christian friends  
to the same gathering.  
Obviously if we are putting heaps of time and energy  
into models of evangelism that are bearing very little fruit  
in the way of people converting to Christianity,  
then we need to reassess our models.  
But we cannot, we must not,  
use that as an excuse for avoiding evangelism.

Sad to say,  
I think the reality is  
that many Christians don't actually know many non Christians.  
And many non Christians don't know any Christians.  
And it's very difficult to share the gospel with people you don't know.  
I know people who have done it effectively.  
Some Korean Christians from Hosanna Church are great

at speaking with non Christians about the gospel  
and inviting them back to events their church is running.  
But for most of us,  
we would need to work in more natural social settings.  
And we would work better in groups.  
Talking about something to do with your faith with another Christian  
while a non Christian listens in,  
that feels more achievable.

But I think for most of us,  
we need to ask the hard question,  
"Is evangelism even a priority for me?"  
"Do I actively prioritise building time into my calendar  
to spend with non Christians?"  
If you are married to someone who's not a Christian,  
which is quite a number of people in our church,  
"Do I plan to do things socially with Christian people  
who are the same gender as my spouse,  
so that my spouse over time can get some Christian friends?"  
"Do I get as excited about missionary work like Luke and Jane's  
as I do about alleviating human suffering?"  
Jesus is the light of the world.  
Not a light, the light.  
And that means evangelism must be a priority,  
however much that runs counter  
to the usual practices of the Anglican Church.

Well normally, I wouldn't preach on one verse.  
As I did last week with 'I am the bread of life',  
I would look to the passage around it  
to shed light on what the phrase means.  
In this case though,

Jesus words prompt a challenge from the Pharisees  
which is not related to the substance of what he has said.  
Jesus does return to his claim to be the light of the world  
when he has finished discussing  
the Pharisees' issues with what he has said.  
We can find that in the next chapter.  
Jn 9:4-5 "As long as it is day,  
we must do the work of him who sent me.  
Night is coming, when no one can work.  
While I am in the world,  
I am the light of the world."

The story is of a man born blind and Jesus heals him.  
Healing the blind man is the work that Jesus is doing in the day time.  
So it gives us another perspective on Jesus being the light of the world.  
The light of Jesus is good.  
Darkness is evil.  
And the work of Jesus is to overturn evil and replace it with good.  
Blindness is evil.  
Being about to see is good.  
And there are certain types of combating the effects of evil  
that can only happen when Jesus is around.  
Jesus' disciples couldn't heal the man born blind  
if Jesus were not with them.  
When Jesus talks about night coming,  
I think he probably means the time of his death.  
His disciples are not going to be running around healing men born blind  
while Jesus is in the tomb.  
That was night.  
The time when it looked like the darkness of evil had won.  
And the disciples were locked in the upper room.  
Healing the sick was the last thing on their minds.

But while Jesus is with them,  
it is still day.  
Day because Jesus, the light of the world, is brightening things up.  
How does he brighten things up?  
By overturning the world of the devil.

Well that does leave us with the question  
of what Jesus being the light of the world means for us.  
He says, "While I am in the world,  
I am the light of the world."  
But he's not in the world in the same way now.  
Has he stopped being the light of the world?  
I would say no.  
The Holy Spirit is the way that Jesus is present in the world now.  
Jn 16:7 "But very truly I tell you,  
it is for your good that I am going away.  
Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you:  
but if I go, I will send him to you."  
Now the Holy Spirit coming to be with Christians  
is not exactly the same as Jesus being there in the flesh.  
But it is Jesus being there in some sense.  
So Jesus is still being the light of the world.  
He's doing it through his Spirit living in us.

And what does that do for us?  
Well in these verses, it allows us to work.  
If Jesus were not being the light of the world,  
then no one could work.  
It would be night.  
But because Jesus is light of the world,  
we can do the work of the Father.

So here's another thing it means for us that Jesus is the light of the world.  
It means that we can serve God.  
The work is the work of serving God not random paid employment.  
But were Jesus not being the light of the world,  
we couldn't serve God.  
Because Jesus is being the light of the world,  
we can serve God.

We run this church ultimately not because we enjoy it  
or because it's good to have a community hub for religious minded people.  
We run it because we want to reach out with the good news  
to this community.  
But we couldn't do that if Jesus were not the light of the world.  
Unless the light of Jesus shines in someone's life,  
they cannot respond to the good news.  
We could work as hard as we liked,  
and it would all be in vain.  
It would be like trying to fill up a bucket with a colander.  
The water would all leak out before you got it to the bucket.  
You could work as hard as you liked,  
you wouldn't make any progress.  
It's the same in our work for God.  
Unless Jesus, the light of the world is shining,  
then we achieve nothing in our work for God.  
But because Jesus is the light of the world,  
sometimes we see radical transformation  
when it feels like you haven't worked nearly hard enough  
to make that happen.  
I saw it last year with James Knell,  
Megan Scully's partner.  
He went from being reasonably disinterested in God,  
to on fire to learn and grow, in quite a sort space of time.

Now there was some work that was done.  
I met with him weekly to watch Christianity Explored together.  
But the change relative to the work done was massive.  
That's what happens when Jesus the light of the world is shining his light.

Jesus is the light of the world.  
That means we Christians won't walk in darkness.  
We won't be ignorant of God or subject to judgement.  
And that means that evangelism is important.  
It's really important that the light of Jesus shines in more lives.  
Jesus is the light of the world.  
It means that we can work for God.  
If Jesus were not shining his light,  
out work would be futile.  
But because the light of Christ is shining,  
sometimes we see startling transformation because of our work.