

Can we believe Jesus?

John 8:12-20

Verse 12 is one of the best-known statements in John's Gospel

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

It's one of the famous "I am" statements of Jesus as recorded by John in his Gospel,
and they each say something wonderful *about Jesus and who he is for us*

- John 6:35 I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry,
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.
- 10:9 I am the gate for the sheep. If anyone enters through me, he will be saved. He will
come in and go out and find pasture.
- 10:11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.
- 11:25 I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though
they die.
- 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear
much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Do you notice the pattern with these statements?

Jesus makes a claim about who he is,
and the benefit for us is related immediately afterwards.
Christ's work was for you! Christ's ministry was to bring blessing for you!

And for most of these statements, the blessing that's in focus
is the blessing of a new life;

a new life in this present world
and a new, *eternal* life in the age to come.

And the statement we have in our reading today is no different
I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,
but will have the light *of life*.

Often when Jesus was conducting his public teaching

his choice of metaphor was determined by what he found around him.
- many of his parables use scenes that were commonplace in Palestine,
He invented characters that many of his listeners would recognize -
and Jesus is doing the same kind of thing
when he says that he is the light of the world.

Remember that the events of chapters 7 and 8

are taking place during the Festival of the Tabernacles in Jerusalem.
We know that on each evening of the festival,
Four huge torches were lit in the temple courtyard.

These torches were so big that each was fueled by 36 litres of oil,
and we know that young men were tasked with the job of
climbing up ladders to light them,

so think of the Olympic cauldron being lit
 but imagine four of them lit up so that light was cast over the whole city.
 And underneath there would be music and dancing;
 Kind of like an ancient version of Vivid (have you been to the Vivid festival?),
 but with fire instead of lasers and projectors.
 Everyone would be gathered together to witness this great spectacle.

Now why was the lighting of great torches part of the festival?

Well, the festival of tabernacles was a festival remembering the OT story
 of how God saved the Israelites from slavery in Egypt
 and led them through the desert and into the promised land.

This is why during the festival everyone slept in tents,
 to remember how their ancestors slept in tents in the desert
 It's why the festival included water-pouring ceremonies
 to remember how God provided water from the rock in the desert
 And it's why they lit these great big torches,
 to remember how God led the Israelites through the desert
 by means of a great big pillar of fire.

We read about that in our OT reading from Exodus, didn't we:
 By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way
 and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or
 night

So it's a festival remembering that time in Exodus when God rescued his people.

And as the OT progressed the idea emerged
 that God would once more provide a light; a light to end all lights.
 So Isaiah says in Ch 9 The people walking in darkness have seen a *great* light;
 on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.
 But this wouldn't simply be a light that would fall on Jerusalem,
 rather this would be a light that falls on the whole world,
 so in ch 49 Isaiah mentions a light for the gentiles
 so that God's salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

So it's during this great spectacle of torch lighting,
 an event which reminded everyone of God's salvation in the past
 and of his salvation to come, that Jesus stands up and says
 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,
 but will have the light of life."
 Jesus says that he is light that will provide the path of salvation,
 the path out of the slavery of sin and of death,
 the path towards a new life both now and in the age to come.

Staying put in the darkness is a dangerous thing.
 I don't know if you saw this in the news this week
 but there's been a movie released recently about a monster

that is rendered harmless as long as no-one can see it.
So in the movie the characters have to go about blindfolded to stay safe.

Now, one unforeseen consequence of this production
is that people in real life have been trying to copy the characters in the film;
they've been trying to do all sorts of things while blindfolded
and they've been taking video of their efforts and sharing it on the internet.
Here's me trying to cut someone's hair with a blindfold,
here's me cooking at a gas BBQ with a blindfold on.
All in the name of imitating art.

It's become such a problem
that the movie's producers have had to release a statement
pleading with people to stop copying the movie, lest they injure themselves.
It's hard to believe isn't it, but it's actually something that's happening.
And of course everyone else can understand the danger;
Darkness is dangerous,
and that's just as true spiritually as it is in the material world.

If we remain in the type of darkness that teaches us that:
 sinning against God is acceptable;
 that the way of the world is preferable to the way of God;
 that Jesus was nothing more than an interesting historical figure-
If we accept *that* darkness and continue to live in *that* darkness
then that's a dangerous situation to be in;
dangerous now and certainly dangerous for the age to come.

But Jesus says I am the light, and if you follow me you will have the light of life.

It's a great promise that Jesus offers those who are listening,
but like all the other promises of Jesus it prompts a question:
"Can we believe Jesus when says these things?"
Should we believe Jesus when he speaks about light and darkness?

These are big claims that Jesus is making:
it's a big deal for Jesus to say our lives are shrouded in darkness;
the things we enjoy doing, the identities that we've forged for ourselves,
are they really a type of *slavery? Darkness? Really?*
And it's a big deal to turn from darkness towards the light.
Lives might need to be undone, habits changed,
and it's a big deal for Jesus to say that he's the one who gives light.
What about all the other God's? Why believe *him*?

The Pharisees who are listening are sceptical.

Verse 13 The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness;
your testimony is not valid."

The Pharisees were appealing to an OT law that said that in serious criminal cases, verdicts could only be rendered on the evidence of multiple witnesses.

By Jesus' day this requirement had been applied to lots of different situations.

"It's our practice", these Pharisees are saying, "not to make any serious conclusions unless we have a good amount of evidence.

But the only evidence you're supplying is your own opinion!

Why should we believe you!"

These Pharisees are seeking what we might call *third-party confirmation*: an outside source that will point back at Christ and confirm what he is saying.

In modern times I've heard plenty of people articulate the same kind of request.

"Did anyone else apart from Jesus say that Jesus is the way to God"

"Is there any evidence outside the Bible for Jesus being the one we must trust?"

These are understandable questions

because we know the importance of independent evidence,

and the Pharisees are seeking the same confirmation.

How does Jesus respond? Verse 14 Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going.

Jesus says that his own words are enough. Why?

Because it all has to do with where he has come from.

Earlier in the Gospel he's told us that he's come from God;

and says this again at the end of verse 16 I stand with the Father, who sent me.

He's also said that he's returning to his Father's side.

What does this mean for his own evidence?

It means that he's speaking with the authority of heaven itself.

His own evidence is valid because *it is God who talking*.

When we are hearing Jesus, we're hearing from the source of truth itself.

And because God exists as *a trinity*,

then, in a way, the requirement for multiple witnesses is in fact met,

verse 17 In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. ¹⁸I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.

And then later on the Gospel we read that the Holy Spirit also testifies to the truth about Jesus (15:26).

So Jesus doesn't need an outside witness,

because he himself is the authoritative source.

It's a bit like if a congregation member here

started boasting about the attractiveness of their newborn baby

(or of their grandchild, or of their niece or nephew),

and in order to prove the truthfulness of their boast
 they produced a photo of the child.
 (I mean we all know that *every* newborn baby is attractive
 so you don't need photographic evidence,
 but just pretend that they whipped out a photo.)

Now imagine if I took the photo and said
 "well that's interesting, but do you have a painting instead?
 Maybe a sketch of some description? Did you have a drawing done?
 Then I'd know for sure that the baby is as good looking as you say!"
 How ridiculous! Substituting the best evidence for something second rate!

And so it is with these sceptics who hear the testimony of Jesus
 and look around for word from someone else!
 So it is with our modern day doubters
 who look for a source outside of God to confirm what they're hearing.
 It's a search for something that is actually less convincing,
 because it's a search for a human authority rather than a divine one.

This is why I've never been convinced
 by those who accuse Christianity of circular reasoning.
 We believe Jesus is God, because Jesus tells us.
 "That's circular!" people say.
 Well, not if Jesus is the foundation of truth.
 If God is the source of all things, including knowledge,
 then Jesus has to point to himself,
 because otherwise he wouldn't be God in any realistic sense of the word.
 If there was *something else* that could convince us,
 then Jesus wouldn't be the highest authority; that other thing would be.
 In Jesus we've come to the end of the knowledge chain,
 there are no more links left,
 which is appropriate if he himself is God.

Nonetheless, God in his generosity does give us some of these lesser evidences.
 In particular we have the historic nature of the NT documents,
 Documents that speak of miraculous works,
 works that convinced the first generation of Christians
 and which were recorded for our own conviction as well.
 But even these are a lesser form of proof.
 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; Jesus says in John
 14:11 or at least, he continues, believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

A couple of questions to finish off with.
 Are you planning on making a significant purchases this year?
 Maybe buying a new car, maybe a big holiday?
 Are you thinking about making a big decision?

A new job? A new place to live?

When you go about making this decisions, how much research do you do?

How much *evidence* do you collect?

If you're like us in our household

you may find yourself collecting loads of evidence;

website reviews and comparisons of all the different options.

Sometimes it's hard to make that right decision, isn't it?

But sooner or later a decision needs to be made!

There may be some of us who feel the same way when it comes to spiritual matters.

We resist making the choice

and we say that its because the right evidence hasn't been presented.

Jesus would say "What are you talking about? Am I not enough?

Enough shopping around! Time to make your decision!

Time to step out of darkness and walk in the light I provide!"

I'll lead us in prayer.