

Where Life is Found

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Date: 30 April 2023

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, good morning everyone. It's lovely to see you here today. Lovely to meet some new faces as well. You are so welcome here today. My name is Graham and I'm the pastor of the church here.

So what I'd love you to do is to open your Bible and come back to John chapter 8 and this is where we're going to be in these verses today. Wonderful verses that have so much to teach us this morning and I've just been so thrilled and challenged to get into this today.

But let's pray, will we, before we begin and then we'll get in. Father, I think of the words of Romans chapter 12 and what Paul would write, the plea to his readers to be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world. Father, we're so aware of the many things that we bring in here today. the worries, the concerns, the doubts, the questions, the grievances, the heartaches.

Father, we pray that you would help fix our eyes on the one who's right at the centre of this passage, who holds out the offer of eternal life to us this morning. Father, we pray in your spirit's power and in the wonderful name of your son.

[1 : 2 0] Amen. Amen. So, with John chapter 8 open in front of you, whoever you are here today, here is the central admission that this passage, as Jesus speaks, he invites us all to embrace today.

And it's an admission that, according to research done by British car insurance company, Sheila's Wheels, remember them? Bonds are car insurance deals.

According to them, the male of the species is less likely to make than the female. And it's an admission that our refusal to admit means that the average driver in the UK drives and get this, it's 276 miles more than they need to every single year.

You with me? What's the admission? I don't know where I'm going. Okay? Asking for directions. You click it on, guys. I don't know where I'm going.

Now, here's the question. When was the last time you put up your hands and admitted that? Yeah? You're lost. I don't know where I'm going. It's not a phrase, is it, that comes naturally to any of us.

[2 : 3 5] Because I think we live in a world where we're taught that we should know where we're going. Yeah? We love to think that we know where we're going.

And the cultural air that we breathe in and out every day trains us to think that today, with all the opportunities that our generation enjoys, that we've got this. Okay?

It's the first song you hear when you go into Disneyland. That lovely lullaby from Cinderella. No matter how your heart is grieving, if you keep on believing, the dream that you wish will come true.

And that sounds very nice, doesn't it? It's lovely. But I don't think it's true for the vast majority of people who live in this world. Right? We drove in there past Sainsbury's, just at the Grange, and there's the lady sitting begging for money.

I don't think that's coming true for her. And yet I wonder if you're convinced this morning if it's true for you. Let me give you two figures that I learned of this week that maybe will help us think on whether the things that the world tells us where life is to be found are actually where life is to be found.

[3 : 42] Here's the first one. Here's the number. 400. Any idea what that is? You won't? Let me tell you. That's the number of hours worth of video content that are uploaded to YouTube every single minute of every single day.

Loving that? 400 hours worth of content. Podcasts, music, opinions, debates. We are a generation who is rich on information.

In fact, I read a statistic this week that in the year 2018, 90% of the information we had as a species was ours only in the last two years.

You got that? So 2016 to 2018, 90% of the information that we have as a species came in those two years. We are a generation that is rich on information. And yet here's the other figure for you.

It's 9.4. So according to my friend that works with young people up and down the country as part of the Keswick Ministries team, that's the percentage of children aged between 3 and 17 in our nation who were clinically diagnosed with anxiety between 2016 and 2019.

[4 : 56] That's heartbreaking, isn't it? If you think about it, with three little girls. That's heartbreaking. And a bit of the numbers now, since 2019, will be well higher than that. So overwhelmed are an emerging generation with reasons to be nervous about the future and burdened by that crushing pressure to make their life mean something.

As M people sing away in the background, what have you done today to make you feel proud? Now we know that it's not quite a straight line between the first statistic and the second statistic, okay?

It's way more complicated than that. But we have to say that those statistics are hugely revealing. And perhaps they suggest that the answers that we think we have in the world today from both within and without ourselves aren't quite as freeing as we perhaps think they are.

Friends, when was the last time that you said to yourself, I don't know where I'm going? And here's why I want you to know that according to the Bible, to embrace that confession, to embrace that admission is not a sign of failure.

On the contrary, that that is actually the beginning of wisdom. Why? Well, because when we begin that journey down the road that says, I don't know where I am going, standing at the other end of that road is an open-armed Jesus Christ whose words offer such deep refreshment and wonderful liberation for our thirsty and our weary human souls.

[6 : 50] Now, this is the claim here he makes today. That isn't a complicated claim. But boy, if we're up for seeing it today, it is a life-giving claim.

And here it is, verse 12 of chapter 8, Jesus says, I am, taking the divine name of God there, we'll come back to that in a few weeks' time, I am the light of the world.

And what will turn that from being a 2D black and white claim into a 3D color one is if we grasp the fact that Jesus doesn't make that claim at a random time and in an unspecified location, right?

In other words, put it in modern terms, it's not like, if I can say reverently, that Jesus is sitting in his living room on Facebook, staring at that screen that says, what's on your mind today?

And thinking to himself, do you know what? I am the light of the world, post-send. When and where Jesus makes this statement is hugely significant and it explains why it was so explosive.

[8 : 02] But before we get there, you might be asking, well, that's very good, but what happened to the first 11 verses of chapter 8, right? Some of you might have clocked that. What's happening to the first 11 verses of chapter 8?

We kind of jumped over that here. Now, it's worth saying that your Bible might have that section in italics or with an asterisk at the bottom. Now, while there is no reason to doubt that that event between Jesus and the woman caught in adultery happened, and evidence from the early church fathers would strongly suggest that, it seems likely that someone added that event in to some of the early Greek manuscripts.

So because it's unlikely to have been in John's original, we're going to skip over it for now, but let me just suggest two reasons why that should be comforting and good news for us today. Here's the first one.

It should give us confidence that the words we have in our Bibles are trustworthy. Okay? That this isn't fables, we're not dealing in myths here. What we're dealing in is carefully and accurately translated history.

And the fact that a discrepancy like that can be flagged only goes to show just how many original and identical copies of John's Gospel that we have.

[9 : 21] So it's good news that the Bible doesn't shy away from that little asterisk in your Bible. It's good news for us. Actually, it's astonishing when you look at the amount of early manuscripts of the New Testament that we have.

Let me just say, if you want to think a little bit more about that, can I highly recommend two things. One is a book by this lady called Amy R. Ewing. She's a wonderful apologist who's based down south in Oxford, I think.

And she's written a wonderful book called *Why Trust the Bible?* One of the best things I've read on this topic. And the QR code if you want to scan it will take you to a little conversation, a little interview between her and Andy Bannister who works for the Solas Public Centre of Christianity up in Dundee.

It's just half an hour you can listen to it on your commute to work. And they just back that around what it means for people in our world today that the Bible is trustworthy. She's fantastic on this kind of stuff, Amy or Ewing.

That's the first reason. But the second reason why that's important to see is that it means that verse, and track with me here, verse 12 of chapter 8 flows directly from verse 52 of chapter 7.

[10 : 34] Okay, just have a look in the Bibles there. Verse 12 of chapter 8 flows directly on from verse 52 of chapter 7. So, when Jesus says I am the light of the world, he's still speaking during this thing that we thought about last week, this Feast of Tabernacles.

Okay, one of the great Jewish festivals that took place every year in Jerusalem. And here's why that is significant. Every year as part of this festival, four enormous lights are lit up.

And they're lit up to commemorate the 40 years that Israel had spent wandering in the wilderness. Now, you can read about that in the book of Exodus if you want to catch up with that.

And so, when the people light these four huge lights, they were remembering the fact that God had led them in the wilderness to the land that he had promised them.

He had led them by light. Okay, more specifically, he'd led them by a pillar of fire at night. And he'd led them by a lighted cloud during the day.

[11 : 47] So, these four lights are going and this is the picture, this is the scene, this is the history that's in the minds of God's people as they watch this and celebrate. So, these four lights are lit all night.

Lighting up the sky. Okay, picture the scene. This is something like Edinburgh Castle at New Year. Right? You just, wherever you are in the cities, you cannot miss that light.

Some historians describe the scene with these four huge lights blazing away that it was like a spectacular diamond that's glowing in the night sky. So, bright was this spectacle.

This wasn't just a festival that looked back though. This was a festival that looked forward. Isaiah had spoken about how God would one day visit his people and he would act to save them and he would lead them by light.

This suffering servant who would come to make good on God's promises to bring them to fulfillment, he would not just be a light to Israel. He would be a light to the nations.

[12 : 57] And his Messiah, the one through whom he would do that, he would be a light to the world. Now this is clicking, isn't it, for where we've been in John's Gospel thus far. And so it's in this moment, in the most public place in the temple, in the Old Testament charged and filled night air, that Jesus chooses to declare to all who would have ears to hear him, he says, I am the light of the world.

You don't know where you're going in life? I am the light of the world. You don't know what tomorrow holds?

I am the light of the world. You don't have the answers in life? I am the light of the world. You're nervous about the future? I am the light of the world. Follow me.

Follow me. That's his invitation to all who would listen to him. I am the light of the world. And maybe just to help us feel the pointy contours of Jesus' claim, all I want to do is just help us as a community this morning, ask two questions of ourselves as we think about his claim.

You up for this? Okay, I'll take that. Helen says yes. Here's the first one. Okay, ask ourselves, are we in denial about our darkness?

[14 : 26] You see, Jesus lovingly says, would you see that without me you are lost in darkness? And he says to the Pharisees and you will die in your sin.

And presumably that is a reference to those who wandered in the wilderness and who perished for their lack of belief in where God was taking them. You are in the darkness.

And if you think about it, it's kind of what makes light, light, isn't it? Okay, I've never met a fireworks company whose business model is to put on displays during the day. It wouldn't last very long, would they?

You see, the Pharisees in this context, they know exactly what Jesus is saying. They are offended by what he's implying, not just because of what he's saying about him, but because of what he is implying about them.

And I have to say this is one of the things that I love most about Jesus. And there's a lot of things. But this is one of the things I love most. Do you spend enough time with him and you'll soon come to see that so unlike our politicians who pick their words based on whether they're going to attract voters or not, that one of the most refreshing things about Jesus of Nazareth is that he's never interested in winning popularity contests.

[15 : 45] There's something deeply endearing about his heart here and that means that we can trust his words.

It means that we should be deeply sobered by what picture he's painting here of the human condition. Maybe three quick pit stops here if we're up for taking notes. Here's the first one.

His origin should humble us. You see, Jesus says verse 23 to the Pharisees, you are of this world. You see, I am not of this world.

He's contrasting the two origins. He is from above. They, on the other hand, are of the flesh. You think in worldly terms and judge things by worldly standards.

Jesus says, when you hear me speaking, you're hearing the very voice of your creator. And that should deeply humble us, I think, when we recognize his origin.

[16 : 47] And maybe secondly, his cross should convince us. Verse 28. Jesus says to the Pharisees, when you've lifted up the Son of Man to see it, and by lifting up there he's talking about his death, there's going to be something verifying about that event.

For it proves that what he's saying is true about the darkness of our hearts and of our world that he's come to save us from.

And he's saying that the cross is a place where we see that our sin is a much bigger problem in our lives than we think it is. It's a much bigger problem than we think it is.

So often what happens when you put your car in for an MOT, isn't it? You get that dreaded phone call from the garage. It's never a good sign when often happens with me that the voice on the other end starts with the word right.

Which is code for, isn't it? There's a lot more wrong under the bonnet than I think you thought there was. And life teaches you that, doesn't it, as you go on in life?

[17 : 57] Actually, you realize sin in my heart is a much bigger deal. There's tentacles in much further places than I ever thought was true.

And here's what I love. I told you about that section in the bit before, about how we're skipping over it. Well, let me just skip into it just for a few seconds. Let me just show you something I had never seen before until this week.

Come with me, okay? Verse nine. So when the Pharisees throw this adulterous woman into the middle of the circle and they say, Jesus, what are you going to do?

Right? She deserves to die. She's got it wrong. She's messed it up. Jesus replies, verse seven. Do you see this reply? Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.

I thought it was brilliant. Again, it's so, the thing that so often convinces me that he is from above, that his wisdom is unparalleled.

[18 : 56] Again, as we see politicians floundering when doing TV and radio interviews, tongue-tied, the PR teams in the background doing all sorts of charades trying to get them to stop talking.

When Jesus is up against questions that put him in between a rock and a hard place, his answers are stunningly good. He is superbly unpredictable.

And isn't it interesting, here's where we kick in with verse nine, isn't it interesting that as one by one they begin to drift away having felt the challenge of Jesus' call, who is it that leads the way?

Look at it. Who is it that leads the way? Verse nine there. It's the older ones. Here is the strange thing about the Christian life, that as we grow and follow Jesus more, we become not less aware of our sin.

We become more of the sin, more aware of the sin of the depth of it that resides in our human hearts. Is that not true? You're not more aware of the things, the ways that you get stuff wrong, as you think about who Jesus is, and yet at the same time running like a speed train on a parallel track to the sin train, is your awareness of the depths of the mercy and the love of Jesus Christ.

[20 : 35] Some of us will have grown up with the words of that old hymn, O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free, rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me.

The gospel says that the Christian life is one where you realize you need Jesus more as you grow, not less. The gospel is not the stabilizers on the bike of the Christian life, right?

We had that wonderful experience three weeks ago where a little girl, Grace, she cracked cycling, she cracked it. No need for stabilizers anymore. The world is yours. But it doesn't work like that in the Christian life, thinking that stabilizers are something we will eventually go out of.

No friends, the grace of Jesus, we never graduate from it. We never graduate from it. And I always remember going to a men's Bible study when I used to live down in Bristol.

And there was a man called Marcus there. Marcus holding down a full-time job. Marcus, three kids at home. Marcus trying to do his best. And there I was as an impressionable 25-year-old who thought he had the world sussed.

[21 : 56] And the conversation comes around to what is some of the insights that you're learning about parenting right now. And I'm fully expecting Marcus to say something like, here's the three top books.

Here's the routine that we have on the fridge at home. And do you know what he said? He just said, I've come to see what was a throwaway line. All I want for my kids, the best thing I can give them is not a college education.

The best thing that I can do for them is show them that I need Jesus just as much as they do. And it's so true. And I know some of you here, you're in that place and you're struggling with the fact that you cannot serve here as much as you can because home life is full on.

And I just want you to know, do not underestimate the example that we can set for our children. That's what we want them to see, isn't it? Do not underestimate your volunteering time for Kids Church upstairs because we need to model to them, we need to example to them the fact that we need Jesus.

We've never graduated from him. We've never diminished in our desire to seek him. It's the best thing that we can give our children. Is it not true in the Christian life that we are meant to be spiritual Benjamin Buttons?

[23 : 16] Now think about that for a second. Spiritual Benjamin Buttons. I've not seen that film, this will mean nothing to you, but go with me. That the older we get, the more like dependent little children we should look.

We are more sinful than we dared imagine, but equally, the cross is where we see that we are more loved than we ever dared to think was possible.

And in John 3, in the context, looking on Jesus, being lifted up. Oh yes, loved it, amen. Being lifted up is the place where we look and we will find life.

His cross should convince us, dear friends, about the darkness in our hearts and his motives should expose us. Do you see what he says, verse 29? They are those who do things that are pleasing to them, the Pharisees here.

But Jesus says, in contrast, I always do the things that are pleasing to the Father. And so as we gaze upon the light of the world, we need to ask ourselves, honestly, with the Spirit's help, are we in denial about the darkness?

[24 : 43] forgiveness. And secondly, and this will be a lot more quick, flip it round. Are we, and as a community today, are we in pursuit of his light?

And I take it that as God's Word has come at us today and as the Spirit has taken it and done his shining and exposing work in our hearts, that we are going to be challenged.

And if you are here today and you do not know this Jesus, that he is just a voice in the world, his invitation is for you to come to him today and see that he is the light of the world.

Just some of us here need to come to the light. We'll think about this next week, that that is the place for true freedom is to be found. The call is to turn from the darkness that you're in.

It's what the word repentance means. It's right at the heart of that word. It means to turn. Turn from the darkness. Turn to the light. Turn from your sin. Acknowledge Jesus' righteousness.

[25 : 52] Turn from the darkness you're in and run to his gracious light. And I guess for others here today, the question is, are we walking in the light?

As we bring ourselves to his words. I love it. The psalmist talks about Psalm 119, God's word being a light to our path. Talking about his word being a lamp to our feet.

And the way that we pursue Jesus is to submit ourselves to his lordship as we allow him to lead us through his words.

Now some of us I know here today as we think about the application of this are making some really big decisions about our futures. Right? Students, you're coming to the end of your degrees. Others of us are coming to the end of our working life thinking about retirement.

All sorts of other things, big decisions that we're making in our lives. Let me ask us, are we making these decisions, bringing them to the light of the world?

[26 : 58] There's a wonderful lady in America called Jen Wilkin and I should have put her quote up but I forgot to put it up. Just finished a wonderful book of hers recently and here's what she says about decision making.

She says, what if the primary question we asked ourselves wasn't what should I do? But above that was the question as we gazed at God's word and gazed at the Lord Jesus, who should I be?

Who should I be? And to be honest, there's tons of decisions that we make in our lives. There's tons of different options but in that decision making process, who should we be?

People of grace, people of patience, people of love, the fruit of the spirit pouring out of our lives, decisions in life. How often is it the default that we run to our own ability to navigate our way through life?

Actually, the call here is to show yourself just dependent on your heavenly father. That he is the light of the world. He is where the place I need to follow. And friends, our words and actions as well, the way that we treat and we speak of one another, are they driven by the light of the world?

[28 : 10] You know, when was the last time that because we looked at the light, we saw that we got something deeply wrong? I always love that the word is described, God's word is described as something that pierces the soul, it's a sharp double-edged sword.

When was the question, when was the last time that word pierced our intentions and our motives? You see how this works? Are we deliberate in our pursuit of the light?

In the words of Matthew Roberts, who's a pastor down in York, in his wonderful little book called *Pride and Idolatry*, he says, abandoning sin is not part of the cost but of the blessing of discipleship.

It's almost Jesus rips us out of the darkness that we are in and puts us on the right track and says, follow me. It's the reason that you and I were made, to worship and to glorify and to know our maker.

Jesus saves us out of it and puts us on track. Do you see what he's saying? Abandoning sin is not part of the cost but of the blessing of discipleship.

[29 : 25] And so as we close and maybe just with the aim of trying to bring us back to that central admission, let me tell you about one of my favorite all-time comeback lines.

Ready for this? My friend Carl had this comeback line and I loved it and he used it all the time. We've got this saying in our culture that so-and-so is a self-made man.

You heard that before? So-and-so is a self-made woman. Normally appearing in Dragon's Den or something like that. People who we look at and we think that they've done it all themselves.

So my friend Carl, when he used to hear somebody use this line of themselves and someone else, he used to reply and he used to say, huh, that's interesting.

Tell me, what part of yourself did you make? Think about it. What part of yourself did you make? I love it.

[30 : 25] Probably not a conversation starter, probably a conversation ender, okay, but it makes the point, is it not true that 90% of the stuff that happens in our life, to be honest, was well beyond our control?

What part of yourself did you make? We love our rags to riches story in our world, someone who's lived the American dream, and yet Jesus, the invitation he makes here to us today is to embrace the admission that we don't know where we're going.

Jesus says, without me, you are in the darkness. And his gracious call, the center of it this morning is a call to renounce all self-reliance and follow him, the one who said that he is the light of the world.

Let's pray, will we? Lord Jesus, we thank you so much today that you are the one who came to, as we sang in that song, lead us out of darkness, lead us out of death.

Lord, I'll be honest, I don't have a clue where this is landing in people's lives today, but I thank you that your spirit is at work in our hearts and in our lives.

[31 : 55] Lord, we long that we would be a community who denounces all self-reliance, stakes it all in pursuing you, the light of the world.

Father, help us even in our prayer life as a church to declare in words, express on our tongues our utter reliance on who you are.

And Lord, as your spirit takes your word, as he pierces our pride, as he binds our wounds, love us. Lord, thank you that you're the one who knows exactly where we're at.

Help us to own that confession. Help us to embrace that admission that where else will we go? For you have the words of eternal life.

Father, thank you for your love for us and we just commit ourselves and the rest of our time together today to you in Jesus' wonderful name we pray. Amen.