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I don't know if you have been watching the latest BBC nature series "A Perfect Planet." Last week's episode, about the sun. *"There is a nuclear reactor 93 million miles away" begins David Attenborough, "We call it the sun. Its rays... give power to life throughout the planet..."*

The sun is the world's *material light*, you could say, but one day Jesus claimed to be the world's *spiritual light*: *"I am the light of the world," he said, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)*

This series. On Sunday mornings we're exploring 7 of Jesus' most stunning claims:

1. "I am the bread of life"
2. "I am the Light of the world"
3. "I am the gate"
4. "I am the Good shepherd"
5. "I am the resurrection and the Life"
6. "I am the way the truth and the Life"
7. "I am the true Vine"

Before we can understand what Jesus meant by these amazing words, *"I am the light of the world"* we must remind ourselves of three background facts.

The first is this: (1) *God is often called light in the Bible* "The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear?" (Psalm 27:1) & *"God is light and in him there is no darkness at all."* (1 John 1:5) So when Jesus *calls himself the light of the world*, he is surely claiming to be God.

(2) *Secondly, Jesus' words remind us of how God led his people Israel through the wilderness many years before: "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." (Exodus 13:21)* God led his people in a pillar of light. And as long as they followed him they had light and safety and direction. So when Jesus said *"I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness"*, every Jew would have said, *"Jesus is claiming to be like that fiery pillar of light that led the people through the wilderness. He's claiming to lead his followers in the light, just as God led his people in the light, through the wilderness."* And yes, *Jesus was saying that!* "If you follow me, the light of the world, you won't walk in the dark, you won't get lost in this life!"

The third background fact that helps us understand Jesus words' is *in the timing, when* Jesus spoke them...

(3) *..Jesus made this claim during the Jewish feast of Tabernacles* . The FOT commemorated that 40 year journey through the wilderness. And every night during the feast four enormous lamps were lit in the temple area. And a Jewish writer who saw this said, *"there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light."* The light from these lamps filled all of Jerusalem with light and joy! In this very setting, at this very moment, Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world!* Meaning, *"the temple is not the light for Jerusalem, I am."*

And “the *light I give* is not just for Jerusalem but for *the whole world!*” No wonder the temple religious leaders were hopping mad!

What is Jesus teaching us?

So with those three facts in mind—and don’t worry if you haven’t grasped them or can remember them - what is Jesus teaching us through this wonderful mind-boggling claim? *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” (John 8:12)

(1) Jesus is claiming to be God

There can be no question that Jesus is claiming to be God. Only God is light so when Jesus says “*I am the light of the world,*” he is claiming to be God. I wonder what you make of that claim. Do you believe it? CS Lewis, an English Christian who lived in the first half of the 1900s said that when someone claims to be God there are only three ways of describing that person:

1. Perhaps they are MAD—they simply don’t know what they were saying, they are to be pitied.
2. Or perhaps when someone says “I am God” it’s because they are BAD—they know full well they are not God but they are trying to deceive everyone, they’re BAD!
3. But if they are not MAD and not BAD, then the only other option is that they are telling the truth and they ARE in fact GOD.

Jesus was not mad and Jesus was not bad, so the only option left is that his claims were true and he is GOD—and of course all of his miracles bear witness to that claim: for only God can walk on water and only God can raise the dead and do all the other marvellous miracles he did. Jesus is claiming to be God, so we should listen to him and bow at his feet. But secondly,

(2) Jesus is telling us that everyone who does not follow him is in darkness!

“*Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” (John 8:12) ...but, by implication, if we *do not* follow him, Jesus is saying, we *are* walking in the dark! Like a band of Israelites who have wandered away from the pillar of fire and are lost in the inky darkness of the desert night!

Jesus is saying: the whole wide world is in darkness without him!

- The darkness of *guilt and shame*
- The darkness of *sin*—powerless to change evil patterns of behaviour
- The *darkness of ignorance*—not knowing the truth about God, about ourselves, about Jesus and about the world
- The *darkness of hate*. “*We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.*” (Titus 3:3)
- The darkness of *unforgiveness*—powerless to forgive what people have done against us
- The darkness of *separation from God*
- The darkness of *purposelessness and emptiness*
- The darkness of *hopelessness* in the face of death (I don’t know if this has been your experience over the past year or so, but on a couple of occasions where the pavement perhaps has narrowed and someone has had to pass me closer than 2m, a look of terror has come across their faces, the fear of

death. Without hope beyond the grave, people are terrified of death and this pandemic has brought that hopelessness to surface!)

The whole world is in darkness without Jesus! In spite of all our knowledge, our clever science (what did Boris Johnson call it the other day, “the miracle of science?”) and in spite of all our brilliant technology, we are walking in spiritual darkness if we do not follow Jesus!

But, thirdly, and here is the good news...

(3) Jesus invites everyone into the light!

“I am the light of the World! Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”
(John 8:12)

Way back, when the whole world was in darkness Isaiah predicted “a light for the Gentiles” would come, (Isaiah 49:6) and he predicted that one day “The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:2) He was talking about Jesus Christ. And sure enough one day God sent his Son, the true light into the world. He took on human flesh, he began teaching and preaching at the age of 30, he suffered crucifixion at the age of 33, rose from the dead, returned to heaven where he had come from and now is seated on God’s shining throne as King of kings and Lord of lords.

And through his word this morning he invites everyone who will listen, “If you follow me, you’ll have the light that gives you life.”

There is no other way to get light, *reason* will fail you, *philosophy* will lead you astray, *science* is insufficient, religion will let you down, *only Jesus* can give you the light that leads to life.

Light is a beautiful image for the work God does in our hearts and lives. Light dispels darkness, light brightens the landscape, light brings joy. Perhaps you are one of those people who struggle with the darkness of the winter months and looks forward to the longer and lighter and brighter days of spring.

I was preaching at a church some years ago. An elderly lady who had just become a follower of Jesus came up to speak to me at the end of the meeting. She did not have all the Christian language that we pick up over the years, but she described her new Christian life like this, “*I’m all lit up inside!*” What a perfect description of the new life Jesus gives to all who will follow him!

The whole of the world lights up! Even creation looks more beautiful because we can look beyond the glorious world we live in to the One who made us and loves us so!

*Heaven above is softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green;*

*(wrote George Robinson)
Something lives in every hue
Christless eyes have never seen:
Birds with gladder songs o’erflow,
Flow’rs with deeper beauties shine*

Jesus offers light to all who follow him:

- The light of *forgiveness*
- The light of *peace with God*
- The light of the *Holy Spirit’s* presence within us

- The light of *God's love* in our hearts
- The light of *purpose and direction in life*
- The light of *hope beyond the grave*

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, today he invites you to begin following him. Acknowledge that he is the divine the Son of God. Forsake false lights. And start following Jesus, which means start listening to him, start obeying him today

And believers *let's remember and rejoice* in what God has already done for us: *"He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Colossians 1:13) "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9*

And as we look to the future, no matter how bleak it may appear, *let's remember his promise to us, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness."*

William Cowper, a Christian English poet from the 1700s, suffered from depression much of his adult life, triggered by a couple of events in the earlier part of his life. But the words he wrote are proof of Jesus' promise, that if we follow him, we will never walk in darkness.

Even though he suffered depression he wrote bright words *of hope like:*

You fearful saints, fresh courage take

The clouds you so much dread

Are big with mercy and will break

In blessings on your head.

His purposes will ripen fast

Unfolding every hour

The bud may have a bitter taste

But sweet will be the flower.

Bright words *of joy* like this:

Sometimes a light surprises

The Christian while he sings

It is the Lord who rises

With healing in his wings.

Bright words *of forgiveness* like:

There is a fountain filled with blood

Drawn from Immanuel's veins

And Sinners plunged beneath that flood

Lose all their guilty stains

And if the Lord Jesus kept his promise to William Cowper, he will keep his promise to you. No matter how dark the days may seem, he promises to be with us and he promises that we will never walk in darkness. *“I am the light of the world,” says Jesus, “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* (John 8:12)