

3. A light to direct



.....Opening prayer.....

We thank you, gracious Lord, for the light you bring to our understanding of your word, through the words of the prophets, apostles and most importantly those of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.



*“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”
(Psalm 119:105)*



What are your favourite ways of keeping up to date with what’s going on in the world, and how unbiased do you think the information you receive might be?

.....The Light of the world.....

Read Exodus 3: 1-9, 34: 29-35

There are notable characters in the Bible who, we are told, hear the word of God directly, and Moses is famously one of these who has a connection with our theme of light.

In exile from Egypt for many years after killing an Egyptian who was beating one of the Hebrew slaves, Moses is now a shepherd in Midian (probably in the northwest Arabian Peninsula) and a married man.

It is while he’s looking after his father-in-law’s flock that he encounters the burning bush and from within it the voice of God “enlightening” him as to his future role – to bring the people out of exile in Egypt.

In case you should think that God’s prophets always dropped everything and obeyed, Moses is a case in point, because he was very reluctant and took some persuading (Exodus 4:13ff).

When the people do leave Egypt they spend some years wandering through the wilderness. God’s word to them that he would lead them to a promised land is demonstrated in the pillar of cloud by day and fire at night that went before them, giving them the flexibility to move on safely at any time (Exodus 13:21, 22).

Later God gives Moses the Ten Commandments, a way of life to be followed should they want God to continue to bless them.

The first set of tablets are broken in anger by Moses because of the people’s lack of faith, but they cannot help but be impressed when Moses

descends from the mountain a second time with two more tablets of stone, having spent time in conversation with God, because when Aeron and the Israelites saw Moses' face it was so radiant with light that they were afraid to go near him. Once more light becomes a symbol of God's presence, and here particularly contained within his prophet, word and promise.

"I would marvel much that any man should be so mad, as to refuse in darkness, light: in hunger, food: in cold, fire: for the word of God is light, food, fire."
- Thomas Cranmer



There are a few reluctant prophets in the Bible. Why is there a reluctance to take on even familiar roles within our churches, and if lack of time is the answer should we be willing to make sacrifices in our other commitments?

Moses was living the quiet life of middle-aged family man and shepherd when he was called to go off and lead the people out of Egypt. Why might God have decided he was the man to do this important task?

The Light of the prophets

Read 2 Peter 1:19-21

For the majority of the people in our Bible, particularly in the Old Testament and for a good 20-30 years after Jesus' death, people heard God's word through the words of prophets, interpreted through their spiritual teachers.

It was the words of the great prophets to which they clung tightly, containing as they did a record of God's promises to his people. It was the prophets who spoke God's word of blessing and judgement, directing the people onto the right path both physically and spiritually, and whose words were seen in the light of history to point toward a future king.

The New Testament writers are unanimous in declaring that Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the prophets' words.

Peter's confidence comes in part from his experience upon the Mount of Transfiguration in the company of the disciples James and John (see Matthew 17) where we read that "There (Jesus) was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus."

While this is happening, they hear a voice from heaven proclaiming Jesus as God's Son.

It is personal experience that Peter brings to his argument, that the rich heritage of prophecy that the people have listened to and studied for generations has an ultimate purpose of revealing

the coming of Jesus Christ. A road map is revealed by the light of God.

There are reassuring words for many of us in Psalm 119:130 "The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."

More importantly, this revelation has nothing to do with human imagination, says Peter, but the words handed down came through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And it's by the same Spirit that these words bring light to those travelling through dark places until, Peter adds, the Morning Star (Jesus) is shining in believers' hearts.



"There are so many things to occupy our minds: so many books, so many examples, so many good teachings that deserve our attention, that say, 'Here is a truth.' But, as I have been serving the Lord these past years, He has led me to seek for two things and two things only: to know the heart of God in Christ and to know my own heart in Christ's light." - Francis Frangipane



How does the quote from Francis Frangipane resonate with your own personal faith journey?

What influence have others had on your Christian life - was it their words, life or both that had a lasting effect?

The Light of Jesus

And so it was that stars led the rest of the world (represented by the Magi) to Bethlehem and to where Jesus had been born. Jesus' own words in the Temple seem to echo this familiar picture.

"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, '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)

The context of this passage is the unbelief of the Jewish leaders, and some indecision in the more general population – was this charismatic teacher the Messiah or even the Prophet who they believed would come?

But there may be more to Jesus' use of this phrase. The disciples and Jesus are at the Festival of Tabernacles and on the first evening was a ceremony called "The Illumination of the Temple" where four great candelabra in the centre of one of the courts were lit. Such was the light from these candelabra that it is said that it reached throughout Jerusalem. The ceremony would be accompanied by the holy men of Israel dancing and singing God's praise.

The glow from the lamps reminded the people of God's presence with them in the wilderness, when the provision of what appeared as a pillar of fire allowed them to move at night, and when light of God's glory entered the tabernacle.

Now through the nation's sin and neglect of their faith, God's light had seemingly departed

and no longer shone within the Temple. So into this celebrating and remembering, Jesus' words take on real significance. For anyone following him there would be light not just for one night in Jerusalem, but wherever they might walk.

The phrase "Light of life" in Greek can mean both the source of life, and the light that gives life, and here it has both meanings. Jesus, the light of God, gives light to those who follow him. Just as Jesus offers the living water (John 4:13) to those who are thirsty. Plants need both water and light to flourish and produce fruit.

For Jesus to claim he was the light of the world was a direct challenge to the teachers of the law as it was seen as a claim for Messiahship, such was their association of the words "God" and "Light" in verses such as Isaiah 60:1.

When Jesus first called his disciples to put aside what they were doing and follow him, we might think that such impetuous behaviour was a little rash. But then we have not seen the Light of Life standing here asking us the same question. What they saw in Jesus convinced them to let him lead them on a journey of discovery that would stretch both their minds and new-found faith.

"Faith is seeing light with your heart when all your eyes see is darkness."

- Barbara Johnson



When you are picking a Christian book, commentary or daily Bible notes do you choose authors whose views match yours, or are you open to alternative interpretations?

How do you believe God speaks today?

Is there something special in the atmosphere of some churches such that you might say that God's presence is there, and have you come across churches that seem to lack that same feeling? Where might the problem lie?

SAMPLE

The disciples were in the presence of Jesus, what do you think it was that persuaded them to drop everything and follow all the way to the cross and beyond?

What is your own understanding and experience of Jesus as "Light of the world"?



“Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”
- Martin Luther King Jr.



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