

Jesus the Light of the World

Nelson Cathedral

March 15, 2026

OT Deuteronomy 16:13-17

NT Ephesians 5:8-14

Gospel John 9:1-12

Introduction

As we have entered the month of March and approach daylight savings, you may have noticed that the mornings and evenings are getting a little colder and a little darker. Our seasons are definitely changing.

This is also a time of harvest – at home our blueberries and blackberries are just finishing, and I know for some of you, grapes and peaches are ready to be picked.

As we come to John's Gospel and continue our look at Jesus through John's eyes, we find Jesus in the same

season - in Autumn - albeit during September-October on the other side of the world. This was also a season of drought after a long Summer, and so wells were beginning to run dry.

But more importantly, this was the time for one of three great Jewish festivals which form the pattern for John's narrative about Jesus.

As we heard from Deuteronomy, the expectation was that Jewish men would travel to Jerusalem and make sacrifices in the Temple during each of these festivals.

- In John Chapter 6, the Passover Festival.
- And in John chapters 7-9, 6 months later, it is the Festival of Tabernacles also known as the Festival of Booths.

Here Booths or Sukkoth (hebr), recalls the rough shelters of branches the Israelites made in the desert.

This is also a harvest festival as olives and grapes are harvested and farmers make rough shelters as they protected and harvested their crops. Maybe for us we would call this the festival of bivouacs.

This was the biggest sacrificial festival in terms of quantity and value, a festival of joy as the people celebrated God's blessing now and in the future.

It is onto these festival stages that Jesus steps:

- And states, "I am the bread of Life" in chapter 6 (v35) during the Passover, which also recalls the manna bread God gave to sustain the Israelites in the desert.
- And now during the Festival of Tabernacles where the motifs of water and light play a very important part to recall God's provision of water and light for Israel in the desert, Jesus

proclaims in chapter 7 (v38) that he is the source of living water.

- and in chapter 8 vs 12 Jesus proclaims, "I am the light of the World".

So let us look at this encounter of Jesus with a blind man as we hear played out in real life, what Jesus being the light of the world means.

Jesus and the Man born blind.

In our reading from John chapter 9 we have heard the first of three parts of this encounter. Jesus dramatically heals a man born blind, but next there is an interrogation by the religious leaders, and finally the man is expelled from the temple.

But through all these three scenes, the contrast could not be more stark as the identity of Jesus is revealed:

- the man who lived in darkness experiences divine light;
- while those who claim to be in the light, still live in darkness.

People knew who the blind man was, he was born blind, a person at the bottom of the social ladder:

- with no hope of employment except begging,
- no hope of marriage,
- no social status.
- Literally he lived in hopelessness and darkness.

It is here that the disciples like the religious leaders get things so very wrong when they ask, was physical blindness due to his sin or that of his parents. That would we like saying, “you must have been a bad person to get cancer” or worse, “God gave you cancer”.

But we need to be careful with our translations, because it almost implies God caused this man’s blindness, which would be cruel.

Instead, it is more accurate to read Jesus saying, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned. But so, the work of God might be displayed in his life, we must do the work of him who sent me while it is still day”.

It is Jesus who must work so that God’s work may be displayed in this man’s life.

Jesus then heals the man using his saliva - something commonly believed to have healing properties in those days. He then told him to go wash his face in the Pool of Siloam.

There is a word play going on here that we need to notice. The word Siloam means “sent”, and this pool was a spring, the only source of water for Jerusalem in Spring, and the source of water for the festival of tabernacles so it had religious value.

The Blind man was told to go and wash in the place called “sent” by the one who was “sent” by God. It is Jesus, not the water, that was the source of the healing. And it was the man’s obedience that led to both physical and spiritual healing.

Now there is one more connection to make. We have already mentioned the importance of water, but this festival was also a festival of light.

If you walk into Nelson at night, you will see our Cathedral tower lit up in different colours and it looks amazing. We all know the joy that festival lights bring – think of Christmas lights decorating houses,

or this July we will have Te Ramaroa – the Nelson light festival when the Cathedral and Piki Mai will be lit up.

Part of the Festival of Tabernacles was the lighting at night of 16 large golden bowls in the Temple court. These were so bright they lit up not only the temple walls but shone light over all of Jerusalem, and just like us, it brought amazement and joy.

It is in this temple court during the Festival of Tabernacles on the last and greatest day that the events of John chapters 7-9 happen, as Jesus declared in John 8: 12 “I am the light of the world”.

And now Jesus has not only given a man born blind sight, He has also given him life.

In this act Jesus is declaring he is the true light that surpasses anything available in the temple, a messenger from God bearing God's word for the world and giving life to all who believe.

Tabernacle light has truly come to Jerusalem, and everyone needs it, but only those who believe in Jesus will have the opportunity to enjoy it as the blind man discovered. The man who once lived in darkness now has light in both eyes and heart, while those against him have physical sight but nevertheless live in spiritual darkness.

So, as the story progresses the identity of Jesus is slowly unveiled:

- He is Rabbi (v 1)
- He is Jesus (v10)
- A Prophet (v17)
- The Christ, meaning Messiah (v22)
- The one sent by God (v33)

- And at the end of the story when Jesus once again meets the man who was healed, we hear his words of faith – Jesus is “Lord” and he worshipped him (v38).

The spiritual blindness removed from his eyes enables him to see who Jesus really is and he becomes a disciple. He has found true life.

Application:

In many ways this is our story as we see clearly who Jesus truly is, especially as we journey towards Easter. And as John wrote in chapter 20 verse 31, “...*these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name*”.

Maybe we can identify ourselves in the blindman’s journey as we too are invited to come and believe:

- Beginning with an encounter with Jesus

- Then experiencing the true light of Jesus and being transformed.
- To confessing as a disciple that Jesus is Lord.

As Paul wrote in our reading from Ephesians, in Jesus we are now children of light and that is how we are to live – in such a way that pleases the Lord. And one way to understand that can be found in the words of Martin Luther King Jr who said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”

Conclusion

The drama of Chapter 9 has played out the meaning of Jesus's announcement at the Feast of Tabernacles that he “is the light of the world”.

In this encounter, light has triumphed over darkness both in the blind man's eyes and in his heart. But the light has also become a symbol of judgment.

The Pharisees and the blind man have each stood in the light and it has unmasked their spiritual dispositions.

In Jesus we see God's promise for us all, that all who come to Jesus will receive life in its fullest. The one who had nothing received everything, while the ones who claim they had it all and needed nothing remained in darkness.

May we continue to live in the light of who Jesus truly is.

Amen.