

John 1v5-9

Date: 9th December 2012

Location: MRC

Word Count: 3500

Christians are to have a testifying & witnessing ministry like John the Baptist – pointing people in darkness to the light.

So then...

Christmas Day - is in 16 days time –

How are you feeling about that?!

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It strikes me that

we have a funny kind of

almost love hate

relationship with Christmas...

One the *one* hand

it's exciting.

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We have advent calendars & trees & lights

& the M&S advert &

& families will travel miles to get together

& there are presents & TV & a double-thickness

radio times & Dr Who & Downton Abbey

& *maybe* a chance to slow down a bit

& the kids love it.

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& yet

for fear of sounding a little too much like the Grinch...

it **can** be more painful too can't it?

Initially because

everyone's exhausted from getting ready

& feeling poor from

buying presents you can't really afford

But then because batteries run out
& the tree needles get everywhere
& what can you do with leftovers that are original & tasty
& there are arguments over
 what you watch on TV
 or “why that brother of yours never helps with
 the washing up”

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& then more seriously...
 the peak in suicides in the New Year
 when people realise
 the new start they hoped for
 never actually came

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OR the fact that Christmas is just a reminder
 of that person who’s not there anymore
 & all you really want for Christmas... is them.

& life **can** end up feeling
 just a little bit **more** dark.

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& You see the world **is** dark.

We saw that last week as we looked at the first few verses in John ...

As our first parents
 shook their little fists at God
 & said they’d prefer to go it alone
 they didn’t want him involved

& the results of the rebellion?

they were excluded
 from God’s presence
 from **life**...

& people were at war
 & the world grew dark

& the lights & the presents & the fat man in a red suit
at Christmas can be an escape from that darkness
...but ...it turns out it's *only* momentary.

The 12 days end

& it turns out the darkness is still there.

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Listen to this from a few years ago

A re-doing of the 12 days of Christmas...

It's there on the PPT for you...

On the twelfth day of Christmas my true love sent to me...

- 12 soldiers serving
- 11 lottery losers
- 10 hoodies hollering
- Nine single mothers
- Eight AIDS victims
- Seven shoppers struggling
- Six carers caring

- Five repossessions
- Four calling comen
- Three starving children
- Two addicts shaking
- And a poor homeless refugee

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I take it their point is that

with the warmth & the joy & the excitement at Christmas

in here

we can feel more than slightly removed from reality

out there

But the reality is there.

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& the **bible** is a real book

it does not sanitize or gloss over that reality.

As you track the story on from Adam & Eve

if you'll forgive me mixing metaphors
but we see that darkness
in glorious technicolour!

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Let me just give you one example that we'll be looking at tonight...
It's Isaiah 9 – a great time honored – Christmas passage...

& rather like in the Garden
God's people have turned their backs on him
the living God

& so in comes the darkness
darkness of sin & ignorance
but darkness too of judgment...

19 When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists,
who whisper and mutter,
should not a people inquire of their God?
Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?

20 Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning.
If anyone does not speak according to this word,
they have no light of dawn.
21 Distressed and hungry,
they will roam through the land;
when they are famished,
they will become enraged and,
looking upward, will curse their king and their God.

22 Then they will look toward the earth
and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom,
and they will be thrust into utter darkness.

9 Nevertheless,
there will be no more gloom
for those who were in distress.

In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun
and the land of Naphtali,
but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles,
by the Way of the Sea,
beyond the Jordan—

The universal mission of Jesus the Light

2 The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.

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You see as we said last week
how do you get rid of darkness...?
you switch on the light

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Which is why when John says

The light shines in the darkness...

Well then we have real cause -- for hope

Here is one who comes from outside the system of darkness

First point then

Remember we saw last week

that *even* though

we had walked out on God

he has not walked out on us

The word who was there at the beginning
With whom God was *always* in relationship.

Takes on flesh & becomes a man.
& has a name & a face...

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God doesn't tell us **what we need to do** to sort things out
He comes down into the darkness & does it.

⁴ In him – *In Jesus* - was life,
and that life was the light of – or *for* - all mankind.

⁵ The light shines in the darkness,

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Into our dark & broken world
Comes light.

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Light of revelation as we understand who God is
...speaking to us & telling us
how we can
be in relationship with him
how we can be truly enlightened!

But light too of righteousness
that deals & does away with sin & darkness...

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I'd love to say to you – if

- you're not a Christian or
- a brand new Christian or
- you're simply not sure

Then the claim of John
is this.

it is that **only** Jesus
can bring the light that you need.

Only in Jesus – do we find the true light
that will deal with our own personal darkness
& also ultimately the darkness of the world
that we live in

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& of course
we look elsewhere
& like moths our hearts flutter
after different things

- A better job or
- More money or
- A spouse or
- Better friends – more friends

Christmas even...??

what **is** it on your Christmas list that you hope & long will

bring light into your darkness??

only Jesus

can really deal with it...

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It's fascinating

even church

won't do the job

Listen to an interview with a comedian

Ardal O'Hanlon

who was in Father Ted

In time honoured fashion I reacted against religion.

Rebelled would be too strong a word.

But the - church provided me with

a strong moral framework and it's been

wonderful at marking the key occasions in my life:

the baptism of my children,

our wedding, any funeral i've been to;

the church performs rituals like no other organisation.

... we should ... recognise the good that it does...

... Belief in God though, now that's another thing.

A terrifying question,

a question that leaves you very lonely,

and confused, and small, and in the dark"

Religion & ritual even

don't help.

Very sadly they left him

lonely, and confused, and small, and in the dark"

As we **all** do...

He needs to hear of the true light...

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So the light shines in the darkness

John says

But then slightly enigmatically he continues...

& the darkness has not **overcome** it.

& we say what does **that** mean?!

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Well as you read through John

which **is** something of a literary masterpiece

the text is peppered throughout

with light & darkness

illustrating good & evil.

it's a favourite picture

that John uses

So listen to 3v19

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world,

but people loved darkness instead of light

because their deeds were evil.

& we're thinking that sounds like..... conflict...

candles although beautiful

can be hit by a gust of wind & go out

bulbs can blow

is THIS light going to keep shining?

will darkness win?

& so he's saying

be very clear – we **do** live in a world

where there **are** such things as good and evil

but know

that they're not equal players

This is not some dualistic Star Wars script

where

the forces are so evenly balanced

& the scale so easily tips

& you're heart's in your mouth

as you're not quite sure
how it's going to end

In fact

The commentators say something in the Greek
suggests he **may** have one particular occasion in mind...

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& **as** you read the gospel

John certainly focuses his story
on the cross where Jesus was
betrayed & ridiculed
& tortured & crucified

The ultimate day of darkness...

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But... a darkness that's followed by
a new dawn
& new light

He dies on the Friday
But raised again on the Sunday

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No...

No

Don't worry

says John

The light shines in the darkness,
but the darkness has not overcome it.

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You see **this** light has life in himself.

He will **never** stop shining.

In his own words

8v12 ..."I am the light of the world.

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

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One of the dangers for many at Christmas

is that we simply keep the baby in the manger
but we must not allow that to happen...

Light and life to all He brings,
risen with healing in His wings.

Mild He lays His glory by,
born that man no more may die;

Born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give them second birth

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King"

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So into the darkness comes Jesus.

& then John the gospel writer
does something amazing...

he gets out his calendar
& shows us when this light of the world came

He walks onto the stage of human history

He tells us

that the word who was there from the beginning
that the word who was the source of life & light

Was not just a theory or an idea or a philosophy or a way of thinking.

He was there when John the Baptist was around.

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So

Second point...

The unique ministry of John the Baptist

At a particular time –
you could plot it in a calendar

& In a particular place –
you could look on a map

& there would be Jesus

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So v 6 – John was sent by God –

just as the prophets of the OT were.

& in fact *just like* those prophets of old

he was sent with

a specific purpose.

a specific job description...

Which was?

He came as a witness –

to testify concerning that light.

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& the word for witness & testimony

has legal overtones.

the kind of word you'd hear in court...

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Now on Tuesday just gone

we prayed at the First Tuesday prayer meeting

& one of the things we prayed for

was – from the Oxford Mail –

for *justice*

& we looked at a section

considering local court cases

from the previous week

called scales of justice

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& so imagine you're in court – in one of those cases

& essentially what happens

is each side presents its case before the judge

& to do that

they present the testimony of witnesses

they presenting people who've

seen & heard a specific event.

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Which is actually rather like what we find in John...

It's as if he's a **barrister** presenting his case
by stacking up the evidence for us
of *many* witnesses.

He –himself was there as an eyewitness

& he was **SO** persuaded by who Jesus was

It utterly turned John's life around

well he would just love to convince us too...
so that we might have this life.

So throughout his gospel

he says **look** at this evidence...

listen to these words...

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& John the Baptist

is just the first of many witnesses

that John the Gospel writer will stack up for us...

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If you're here &

perhaps you're just looking in on Christian things

& you don't have a bible

we'd love to encourage you

to take one for yourself...

That is our gift to you.

Take it & read it

look at the evidence for yourself...

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You see the Christian faith

isn't about blind faith

anymore than the convictions made

in Oxford crown court this week

were about a judge
flipping a coin to decide the result.

John will stack up one expert witness after another...

- the **Samaritan** woman in chapter 4
- the **Old Testament** in chapter 5
- the **Holy Spirit** and the **apostles** in chapter 15.

He's longing that we would
listen & consider the facts...

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& so the first witness
that John the Gospel writer calls to the Bar
...is John the Baptist.

If you like
He's the **preview** witness –

the witness who announces the coming of the light.

the one who later in the chapter will point
straight at Jesus &
declare:

Look, the Lamb of God,
who takes away the sin of the world!

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& it's for for a very specific purpose...
that John the Baptist announces the light's coming

Did you notice that in v 7?

He came as a witness to testify concerning that light,
so that through him
all might believe.

That was the **purpose** of John's testimony.
That's not to say that it was always the result –

as we've already seen

darkness does not like light.

But it was always the purpose.

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in one sense had something of a crucial job

he was the last of his kind –

the final prophet

before the one

they had all been pointing to

turned up

And yet... it's striking... did you notice what

John the Gospel writer

is SSSsssooooo keen for us to latch onto

about John the Baptist in v8?

He himself was not the light –

he came only as a witness to the light.

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Of course John the Baptist knew THAT

A **great** grasp of his role in the scheme of things

where he fits in...

...which means his ministry was marked by humility –

deflecting attention

away from himself and

onto Jesus.

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So flick down with me

at vv 19-20...

Time has ticked on

Word has spread

John is surrounded by a crowd –

He's flavour of the month

they were clearly impressed by

what he was saying

& so the crowds

ask him -- who are you?

And his reply – v 20:

I am not the Messiah

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A little later on in the gospel – in ch 3

John the Baptist says these words:

He [Jesus] must become **greater**

I must become **less.**

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John is famous himself

a witness to Jesus...

but then

as the main event comes onto the stage

as the light arrives

so John slips into the shadows...

he's done his job

The best man steps aside

because here comes the groom

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John had a **unique** ministry

for a specific period of time in Salvation History

But there's a big sense in which

what John **did**

we **do**.

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We – like him - also testify to who Jesus is.

We – like him – point people away from ourselves and onto him

the light

It's why we have lots of events at Christmas

where you can bring

friends & colleagues & neighbours & family...

Do be brave in inviting folk...

You see

Just as John would point & proclaim

look the lamb of God

who takes away the sin of the world

So do we

Just as John would say

"He must become **greater**

I must become **less**".

So do we

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Or at least that's the theory...

Because no doubt you'll know **your** heart

as well as I know mine

& **personally** how easily pride comes

& we want the glory for ourselves

Rather than pointing to him

We end up pointing to us

& church becomes about me & what I want

& wanting people to notice me

& to serve me

& we compare & contrast with everyone else

& feel insecure if we're not at the top of the pile

& yet we should just be pointing people to the light.

It's about him –
it's not about us...

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Or it can even be a **corporate** thing...

We want people to notice Magdalen Road Church

For them to think that we're

a good church...

a loving church

a friendly church

a relevant church

which is fine...

as long as that's because we want them to see how brilliant

this light of the world is

It's not about Magdalen Road Church

It IS about Jesus.

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The famous & successful Christian missionary

Corrie Ten Boom

was once asked if it was difficult

for her to remain humble.

She replied..

"When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey,

& everyone was waving palm branches

and throwing garments on the road

and singing praises,

do you think for one moment

it ever entered the head of that donkey,

that any of that was for him?"

"If I can be the donkey

on which Jesus Christ rides in his glory,

I give him all the praise and all the honour"

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Having been here for a 18 months or so
& I look around

I **have** to say – it’s humbling - I see many
John the Baptist types at Magdalen Road
people who just quietly get on with it
who point people to Jesus
without a big song & a dance

Wouldn’t it be amazing to be a church
full of John the Baptists??!

Together saying – come & see the light of the world.
come & find life

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Just as we finish

let me read to you from Isaiah 60.

He’s on tiptoes

He’s breathless as he looks ahead

to when Jesus returns again

to when all the darkness has gone

“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

2 See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.

3 Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Let’s pray