

Sunday 05 February 2012.
10.30am
Handing on the eternal flame x06.

Light and darkness: READ John 8:12 – 20; 31 -33; 42 -47.

(PP1)Theme for 2012: handing on the eternal flame.

In January we have begun laying the foundation for this year of outreach 2012. We have been speaking and thinking about the identity of the Eternal Flame. We saw how having met, worked with and got to know Jesus of Nazareth John in both his letters and Gospel argued that .Jesus was the *Light of the World*, and the *eternal Word or Logos* who had existed from the very beginning with God the Father. Jesus is not just the Christ of the Jews but the “eternal flame” which has never been extinguished,

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.

John 1: 5. (Memory verse!)

Bishop Lesslie Newbigen entitles his exposition of John’s gospel as, *The Light has come*. He writes after 30 years missional reflection having lived and worked amongst the Hindus of South India. Newbigen wants God’s Word to be heard clearly in today’s world so that we can challenge the culture in which we live: light challenges darkness. Over the next weeks we shall therefore be asking ourselves: **what are the systems of evil and darkness that we face here today?** We are not occupied or controlled by a military system or power in the UK that we can label as “the enemy” but there are systems which we have built and sustain which have things of darkness about them.

What has tried to extinguish the eternal Flame – the light at various times and places?

We don’t wrestle against flesh and blood (individual people) but systems or *principalities and powers*. (Things that rule – *on earth as in heaven* – human systems/ political powers which Paul and others argue are actually supported and manipulated by spiritual dark forces).

(PP2) READ Ephesians 6: 12.

For example: what were the systems, the powers, the rulers which sought to oppose Jesus at his birth and during his life and ministry?

They were Rome & its Empire (the occupying power) in collusion with corrupt Jewish authorities. E.g. Herod – sought to extinguish the Light of the World. Many would believe that behind those powerful human beings and systems were the corrupt dark spiritual forces. These forces therefore cannot be defeated merely at a human moral level but must be defeated at a spiritual level and with spiritual weapons.

Ephesians 6; 10 Our strength to defeat darkness and powerful systems comes not from ourselves alone but from our *union with the Lord*.

(PP3) I feel it right therefore today to remind you and myself that we must stop fighting the darkness – in our family’s lives and in the work place, and wider afield in a merely human way. Some of us are using up all our strength to try and change our family members and people we know and NOT using the weapons that we need. We will never see change in people’s behaviour and belief system by ourselves. Some of you are being burnt out by trying too hard to change people – time needs to be spent in prayer for others and for yourselves so that you may say “I love you and therefore I am saying NO I am not bailing you out again! I love you but I will not support you in this wrong choice...” How do I know this? Because I’ve tried myself to convince and change some people without success....

The world view revealed in Scripture is that:

Our conflict is not against individual human beings but against spiritual and moral systems that are corrupt. Human beings are conditioned to think and behave in certain ways which are opposed to God’s ways.
Duality: Light is in conflict with darkness (within our own selves and in the world) – We are therefore in conflict *with the rulers, the authorities, against the world rulers – of darkness – the spiritual hosts of evil in the heavenlies.*

(PP4) The moral and spiritual battle is summed up in the phrase **Light and darkness.**

Jesus is at the very heart of this conflict – and we shall see in the weeks ahead how he did battle with the one he called the ***Prince (ruler) of this world.*** (*John 12: 31; 14: 30; 16: 11*).

Jesus himself is the true *ruler or prince of the Kings of the earth* (*Revelation 1:5*).

Military images are used throughout the Bible to describe the cosmic struggles that have gone on since before the dawn of time e.g. *Daniel 10: 13, 21* (*Guardian Angel of the country of Persia – Islamic Republic of Iran* against the dark force: the Prince of Persia).

(PP5)

Darkness (*skotos*) is a word used for many things:

- a) physical darkness
- b) intellectual darkness
- c) blindness
- d) as a metonym for a place of punishment or
- e) those in moral & spiritual darkness
- f) as a metaphor for moral & spiritual darkness (e.g. *Ephesians 6: 12* Paul describing a *dark age* and cosmic forces at work when he was alive. *Rulers of the darkness of this world.*
- g) of evil works
- h) of evil powers that dominate the world *Luke 22: 53*
- i) of secrecy

John 1: 5 READ.

Jesus is described by John as *the real light – the light that comes into the world and shines on everyone.* (V9)

He says, *The word was the source of life, and this life brought light to humanity.* (v4)

Those who follow Jesus *will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness.*(8: 12)

(PP6)Verse 5 speaks about duality: light over against darkness. (This is not the same as a dualism of the material and spiritual world).

It is the function of light to shine in the darkness and overcome it. John's gospel says much about the opposition of light and darkness. John does not say that the light has shone. He says the light SHINES – it is continually in action.

Human beings stand condemned because we have chosen darkness rather than light. (3:19) When we do evil we choose darkness.

Jesus calls us *out of darkness* (8: 12)

Even though humans continue to choose darkness rather than light **rejoice** – *the darkness has not overcome or put out the light.*

What action are we saying hasn't put the light out (aorist)?

- a) Creation? (i.e. *Genesis: light shine!*)– no the light/ sun still burns
- b) The Fall of humans? – no
- c) Jesus in the wilderness struggle? – no
- d) Calvary? There light & darkness came into bitter conflict.

But John means this truth on more than one level but also as one key fact – the light is still shining!

V5 is a masterpiece of planned ambiguity. D.A.Carsons: we could read it in different ways – obviously it states the truth about creation...BUT everyone who reads the rest of the book will see that it predicts/ anticipates the light darkness duality that dominates the rest of the book and the struggle we face each day and each generation.

The **darkness** in John's gospel is not only the absence of light but the presence of real evil and the light is to do not just with creation but Salvation! Darkness rejects light because it does not according to John comprehend or understand it. As it says in another Scripture in the Bible – *light and darkness cannot mix, they cannot fellowship together.*

What about our day and culture – this dark world?

What is the current darkness?

We do not battle against individuals but dark systems: what systems and rulers? Where are they controlled? I suggest one: Mammon which leads to human greed and all the ills and darkness that follows from choosing this darkness rather than following the light.