

John 12:36

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[0 : 0 0] 11 days and counting. Have you decided who you're voting for? I wonder what has or what will determine your vote. Is it a matter of habit or party loyalty? You always vote in a particular way or direction, or is it governed by specific policies that concern you, and so you establish what the different parties' position is on a given matter that is of concern to you. Or maybe your concern is who will be the prime minister, and you're concerned about ensuring in the measure that it's in your hands that it would be the man or woman that you think is most suitable.

Or maybe you're more concerned with the local situation and who your local candidates are and where they stand and what they stand for. There's any number of reasons and perhaps a combination of these that will determine or influence how we vote. I wonder how important for you is the matter of trust. Is it all about trust? We hear that bandied about a lot. It's all about trust. Who can you trust? I don't know how good your memory is, but I wonder if you remember from five years ago, five years ago just now, the near messianic front page on the Sun newspaper on the 6th of May, the day of the election five years ago, and it featured an image of David Cameron in the form of that very iconic Barack Obama poster. You can maybe visualize that Barack Obama poster.

Well, in that form, there was a full-page image of David Cameron, and it was accompanied by the words, in Cameron we trust. And then there was a little spiel, and at the bottom of the page were, in bold type, our only hope. Now, regardless of what your views are on the said Mr. Cameron, it was rather a strange way of presenting him on the day of the election, and one that I think as Christians we would have great difficulty with. Well, what do you think of this assertion regarding any politician, be it Cameron or Miliband or whoever it might be? In Cameron we trust, or in Miliband we trust, or in Nicola we trust, and you can put in whatever name you choose and pose that question, this matter of trust. And you find, especially as we approach the election day, that politicians will often avoid a dry discussion of policies and pledges and try and make that personal connection with the electorate, with you. You can trust me, is the message that they try and get across.

Let me just give you one example of that that I came across just a few days ago in an interview. As it happens, it was with Ed Miliband, but I'm sure I could have found something similar with the other prominent candidates. And let me just read what he said in this interview. And he said this, I'm giving a very personal promise. I think with a stress in the word personal. Everything in our manifesto will be paid for without any additional borrowing. Well, that was the promise. But then what did he go on to say? The British people can trust me on that. It is my unbreakable, unshakable bond to you from today for as long as I am in power. What's the message? What's the big message there? It's not so much the details of how he's going to reduce the deficit or whatever. It's you can trust me. Trust me on this. And as I say, others would try and get across a similar message.

But can we? Can we trust David Cameron or Ed Miliband or Nicola Sturgeon or any other politician or indeed any other person? To be able to trust somebody is a very precious thing. I would say it's a beautiful thing to be able to trust somebody without reserve. Indeed, to be trustworthy is a character trait of the highest order. But can we? Can we trust anybody? Or is it the case to paraphrase a verse of the Bible? A trustworthy man? It's more than a paraphrase. It's really an adaptation. A trustworthy man who can find? Well, Jesus claims to be that man. Jesus looks you in the eye and declares without a hint of irony and without any qualifying conditions, you can trust in me.

[5 : 40] And it is to this matter that I want to turn our attention this morning with the help of one verse that we find in the passage that we read in John's Gospel and in chapter 12. We're going to focus our attention on verse 36. Indeed, the first half of that verse. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light. These are words of Jesus directed to the Jews that he was in discussion with, and he speaks to them directly and clearly with these words. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light. And these words of Jesus, this verse can be divided or is made up of three clear and concise statements that we need to consider and understand. In these words, we find what we might call a heartfelt plea on the part of Jesus. The heartfelt plea is found at the beginning of the verse, put your trust in the light. This is the plea that is directed to the Jews and directed to us this morning by Jesus. Put your trust in the light. But in the words of Jesus, we also have what we could call a declared purpose, because what we read and what continues in the verse is, put your trust in the light while you have it, so that, that identifies that there's a purpose to this, so that you may become sons of light. This is the declared purpose stated by Jesus. Put your trust in the light in order that, so that, that the outcome might be that you would become sons of light. But also, at the heart of these words, there is a third statement, what we might call a solemn warning, because in these words, we also have this statement by Jesus, put your trust in the light while you have it. Indeed, Jesus begun what he said with these words. In our translation, the order has been changed for understandable reasons, but what he actually says is, while you have the light, put your trust in the light, so that you might become sons of light. Three very clear statements. As I say, a heartfelt plea, that's what we'll think about first, a declared purpose, but also, and we'll close by thinking of this, though Jesus begins with these words, a solemn warning. While you have it, while you have the light, this is what you must do. So, let's think about what's at the heart of these words, this heartfelt plea. Trust in the light. Put your trust in the light.

Now, what is that all about? What does that mean? By itself, it sounds like something out of a sky-fi movie. You could imagine the alluring voice pronouncing the words, just trust in the light, as the unsuspecting victim advances in a zombie-like trance towards some fearful or maybe even wonderful encounter. Just trust in the light. Well, what does it mean? What does Jesus mean when he says to those who were speaking with him then, and when he says to us this morning, put your trust in the light?

I think we need to ask three questions to help us understand this heartfelt plea. And I won't tell you in advance what the three are, but we'll just go through them one by one. So, I think these three questions, as we try and answer them, will help us to understand what this means. Put your trust in the light. The first question is a very basic and fundamental one, is this. What or who is the light?

If I'm going to put my trust in the light, if you're going to put your trust in the light, well, what is that? Who is that? And it's clear that the answer to that question is Jesus. Jesus is the light. And I say that not just because it's the obvious answer. It does rather remind me of in another life, well, not quite another life, but several decades ago, I was a Sunday school teacher in Govan Hill Free Church in Glasgow. And I think my class was made up of three children.

Two of them were two wee boys who were twins who would come occasionally with their granny. And so, their attendance wasn't that regular for that reason. And they didn't get much, it seemed, of the Bible at home. And I do remember that whenever I asked them a question, whatever question I asked them, if they were unsure, they would just answer Jesus. Because they thought, well, there's a fair chance that will be the answer. Of course, one way or another, they usually had some point there. Well, that's not what I'm doing here. I'm not saying, well, the answer is Jesus because, well, I guess it's got to be Jesus. There are reasons for saying that the light is Jesus. Let me give you two reasons. First of all, we have the immediate context of the verse and the discussion that is taking place. What Jesus says here, He says in the context of a very heated, really, discussion with Jews who are speaking with Him. If we notice in verse 12, we can see the context, the historical context, I suppose, of this conversation. There we read in verse 12,

[11 : 33] The next day, the great crowd that had come for the feast heard that Jesus was in His way to Jerusalem. This is the triumphal entry. These are the final hours, the final days of Jesus' life on earth. So that's when this is happening. And then in verse 35, Jesus says something that makes it very clear who the light is. Because in verse 35, then Jesus told them, you are going to have the light just a little while longer. So He's speaking in the context of His imminent death. And in that context, He says, you are going to have the light just a little while longer. So it's very clear what He's saying.

He's saying, I'm the light and I'm about to go. I'm about to die. I'm about to be lifted up. And I won't be with you. The light is going. Just a here a little while longer.

So in the immediate context of this discussion that Jesus is having, it's clear that the light is to be identified with Jesus. But also if we think of the broader and wider context of the whole gospel, and indeed declarations by Jesus that are recorded in the gospel, we come to the inevitable and clear conclusion that the light is Jesus Himself. The very beginning of John's gospel, this theme of Jesus as the light is prominent. In verse 9 of chapter 1, we read, the true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. In a chapter, of course, that is speaking about Jesus coming into the world.

It describes Him. It identifies Him as the true light. And then, of course, we have the words of Jesus Himself that we're familiar with and that John particularly records for us. In chapter 8 and in verse 12, we read, 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. And He expresses Himself in similar fashion in the following chapter. So it's clear in answer to this first question, we're thinking about the heartfelt plea, trust in the light, put your trust in the light. We're looking to understand this plea by posing three questions, the first one being, who or what is the light? And the answer is clear, Jesus is the light. But that leads on to another question that we can pose, and it is this, what does this designation or description of Jesus as the light, what does it tell us about Jesus and His mission?

Why is He spoken of? Why does He speak of Himself as the light? Well, the answer to that, I think, is also clear enough. Jesus as the light helps us to see. Without the light that He provides, without the light that He is, we can't see clearly. We're in darkness. We are not able to see what is ahead of us. We can't see ourselves. We can't see God. But with the coming of Jesus, there is a coming of light that helps us to see. But what does Jesus help us to see? Let me suggest three things that Jesus helps us to see that are interrelated. The first thing, the first person, the first one that Jesus helps us to see is that Jesus helps us to see God. To draw into our discussion another verse that we find that is very relevant in this context, in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, his second letter to the Corinthians, in chapter 4 and verse 6, we read, for God who said, let light shine out of darkness, made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Now, there's deep truths and theology there, but at heart what is being said there is that in Jesus, we can know God. We can see

[16 : 11] God as He really is. In Jesus, the darkness that doesn't allow us to see God is dispelled. Jesus, the light of the world, helps us to see God, helps us to see His Father. We're reminded of what Jesus said on another occasion, if you have seen me, you have seen the Father. So, He is the light and He is described as the light and He describes Himself as the light because He helps us to see, He helps us to see God. But He also helps us to see ourselves. If we turn to a verse in this same gospel in John chapter 3 and verse 19, you see what is said there, this is the verdict, light has come into the world.

Again, a reference to the beginning of the gospel and the person of Jesus. Light has come into the world, but men love darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. And then what does it go on to say?

Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. You see, that's the effect of the light. It exposes evil. It shows it up. That which was hidden is now visible. And that's true in our own lives. Jesus is that light that helps us see ourselves more clearly. See our own condition, our own sinfulness, our own need of forgiveness, our own need of a Savior. All that becomes clear. All that becomes visible to us as the light of Jesus, the light of the gospel is shed. So, Jesus helps us to see God. He helps us to see ourselves. But He also helps us to see the way in which we are to walk or the way of salvation in the chapter or the passage that we're looking at. This is clear. In verse 35, what do we read? Then Jesus told them, you are going to have the light just a little longer. Walk while you have the light before darkness overtakes you. Walk while you have the light. The only way you're going to be able to walk in the way that you ought to walk in the direction that you ought to go is with the help of the light. You need the light in order to walk as you ought to walk and in the direction that you need to go.

Jesus helps us to see where we are to walk. He helps us to see the way back to the Father. He helps us to see and to understand God's way of salvation. And of course, that way is the way of the cross. In this very discussion, this is what Jesus is highlighting to His skeptical hearers, that He must be lifted up, that He must die. And they protest, how can it be that the Messiah will die? Because we are told in the Bible, in the Old Testament, that His reign will be an eternal one. And yet you're talking about Him dying.

How can that be? Of course, they didn't understand or chose not to understand, refused to understand. Of course, this death was not one that would close the chapter on Jesus' saving work. Rather, it was the necessary component of it, that He would die for sinners and rise again, triumphant from the grave and reign. And reign eternally indeed, as was declared by the prophets in the Old Testament.

[19 : 52] Jesus is described and describes Himself as the light because He is the one who helps us to see, to see God, to see ourselves, to see the way of salvation. Then one final question with regard to this matter of this heartfelt plea of trusting in Jesus, what does that actually involve? What does it involve to trust in Jesus? Jesus tells us to trust in the light or to trust in Him, but what does that look like?

Well, we are to trust Him to be the one through whom we can know and see God as He really is. We are to trust Him as the one who will indeed help us and enable us to see God. We are to believe that in Jesus we will come to know and see God. We are to trust Him to be the one who will show us who we really are and what we really are like and what our need is. We are to trust Him to be the one who can lead us in God's way and into an experience of God's salvation. It's significant that the form of the verb that Jesus uses here, translated in our verse, put your trust in, carries the sense of a continuing or permanent trust in Jesus. This is not about a dramatic or mysterious one-off spiritual experience, but about a day by day trusting in Jesus as the light of the world, as the one by whom we can know

God, as the one by whom we can see ourselves, as the one by whom we can know and experience as salvation. What this trusting involves can also be further understood by noticing the accompanying verbs that Jesus uses in His discussion with the Jews on this occasion.

In the previous verse, He speaks of walking in the light. Putting your trust in the light is accompanied by, involves walking in the light. It involves action on our part. He also speaks a little further back in the discussion, but it's the same discussion in verse 26. He speaks about serving Him and following Him. This too is part and parcel of what is involved in putting your trust in the light. Walking in the light, following, serving the one so designated as the light. It involves your heart, but it also involves your will and your hands and your feet. It's about handing over all that you are and all that you have unconditionally to Jesus. There can be no greater act of trust, but it is an act of trust that will not be or not lead to any disappointment. The heartfelt plea, put your trust in the light.

But then more briefly, you have the declared purpose. And what is the declared purpose? Well, we have it there in the verse, so that you may become sons of light. We trust in the light in order or with a purpose that we might become sons of light. Now, in our own experience, it may be that we put our trust in Jesus without even being aware that the outcome will be that we become sons of light. We may be oblivious to that, and that doesn't preclude us or doesn't stop us from trusting in Jesus. But it is God's declared purpose that as we are enabled to put our trust in Jesus, to believe in Jesus, the outcome will be, and the purpose is that we might become sons of light. But what does that mean? What does it mean to be sons of light? Now, in Hebrew, in Hebrew idiom, the expression son of or sons of is used to identify those so described by the quality in question. To give you an example, you may remember how Jesus gave James and John the nickname sons of thunder. And clearly, the intention was that this would, in a way, describe what they were like, their character, sons of thunder. Well, in our verse, this expression, sons of light, is used to describe those who are characterized by, who are distinguished by light. But what does that mean? What does that look like? Well, let me refer you to just one other passage that can help us better understand what it means to be sons of light. And that's what we are if we're trusting in Jesus, so it's good to know what that means. In Ephesians chapter 5,

[24 : 51] Paul uses this same expression. And let's just turn quickly to what he says with regard to this expression. In Ephesians chapter 5 and in verse 8, we'll read through to verse 10. Three verses.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, or as sons of light. For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth, and truth, and find out what pleases the Lord. What does that tell us about this expression, about this reality of being sons of light? Well, the first thing that it makes very clear is that our light, as sons of light, is in the Lord. He is the source, and we are light only in Him.

It is only as we are in Him. It is only as we cling to Him. It is only as we trust in Him that we are light. Separate from Him, then the light fades. You've probably heard the story of the minister who was visiting one of the folks in his church who had lapped somewhat in their attendance, at the means of grace, at the services, and their involvement in church. And he was concerned, and he was visiting this particular person. But he wasn't really too sure how to broach the subject. He didn't want to make them feel uncomfortable. And after the pleasantries, at the beginning of the visit, there was this awkward moment when it wasn't very clear how the conversation would progress.

But there was a fire that was burning in the living room there of the home that was being visited. And all the minister did, or so the story goes, is he took out one of the coals from the fire, and he just placed it apart from the burning fire. And he just left it there, and he didn't say anything.

You can imagine, you can visualize the scene, how that burning coal that was bright and flaming, shining as it was in the fire, as it was removed, how little by little, it began to fade. And the light began to fade until, with the passing of time, there was no light left.

[27 : 08] And why was that? Because it wasn't in the fire. It was separate from the fire, and it could not have any light out with the fire. And so, for us, if we are sons of light, we are sons of light in the measure that we are in the Lord, to use the language of Paul.

But these words, or these verses that Paul writes, also remind us, or make clear to us, that our light as sons of light is visible in the measure that we become ever more like Jesus.

In the measure that we display goodness, righteousness, and truth. This is what Paul says in those verses in Ephesians chapter 5. Let's just notice again the manner in which he describes that. Live as children of light, for the fruit of the light, the evidence that you are indeed children of light, consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth. In becoming more like Jesus, the one who preeminently is characterized by goodness, righteousness, and truth. The more we are like Jesus, the more we shine. And then Paul ends that little section by also speaking of how the sons of light have as their greatest desire to please the Lord.

This is the declared purpose that follows on from putting our trust in the light. But finally, in these words of Jesus, we have what we could call a solemn warning. Because Jesus says, in the midst of encouraging his haters to put their trust in the light, in the midst of declaring to them what the outcome will be, he also declares these somber words.

While you have the light. And as I was commenting a few moments ago, that's really how this declaration of Jesus begins. While you have the light. And the emphasis is on this introduction to what he's about to say. While you have the light, put your trust in the light, that you might become sons of light.

[29 : 27] And these words, and indeed the words that Jesus has already spoken in verse 35, introduced this great urgency to the matter. In verse 35, Jesus told them, you're going to have the light just a little while longer. Just a little while. While you have the light. Before darkness overtakes you.

Trust in the light. What can we draw from these words? While you have the light. From what Jesus says there in verse 35. What can we draw from them? Well, I think we can draw this. That for as long as you fail to trust in the light, we can say first of all that your present circumstances, your present predicament is a serious one. You're walking in darkness. In verse 35, it's clear. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. That is where you are walking. That is the atmosphere in which you are. It's darkness. You can't know where to go. While you fail to put your trust in the light.

That presently is a serious predicament to be in. But perhaps more solemnly, and the emphasis of Jesus here is that your eternal destiny, what awaits you, is a very solemn and tragic destiny. Darkness will, in due course, overtake you. Darkness will overtake you. You can run, but you cannot escape from the darkness. Darkness, darkness sooner or later. However much you run, will overtake you. As I was reading this verse, what came to mind visually in my head for some reason was as we were flying home from Dubai to Glasgow on Monday, you have the option of a flight tracker on the screen in the seat in front of you, and you can follow the progress of the plane. And one of the images that is available for you to have an idea of what's going on is it shows day and night time across the globe. Of course, as we left

Dubai in the afternoon, it was maybe two or three hours before it would have gotten dark in Dubai. We were heading away from the darkness. We were heading west and northwest, and so we were in a way escaping the darkness. And it was almost entertaining to watch the darkness chasing us across the globe.

And it wouldn't catch up with us because we were keeping ahead of it. And, you know, I suppose a kind of childish thought in my mind, I thought, well, wouldn't it be fun to just carry on flying and never be caught up by the darkness and just go round and round and round? I don't think that would be fun at all, but that was the thought that went through my mind. And of course, we can't do that. Eventually, the darkness will overtake us. Well, in the spiritual realm, this is so much more solemn. You can run, and you can run, and you can run. But while you do not put your trust in the light, the darkness will overtake you and consume you and overcome you. This is what Jesus is saying. Walk while you have the light before darkness overtakes you, before it's too late. And of course, that is the great truth that we can draw out from these words of Jesus. Time is running out. In the case of the conversation that he was having, Jesus was soon to leave them. He would soon be lifted up and crucified. He would no longer walk with them, the dusty paths of Galilee or the streets of Jerusalem. He was soon to leave them. And while that was true, this reality that Jesus would no longer be with them, while that was true in a particular historical way for the Jews, it remains true for us today. There is, in these words of

[33 : 29] Jesus, an urgent call to all those who are not trusting in the light. How long will you resist the gracious call of Jesus? Time is running out? How long will you delay? How long will you postpone? Put your trust in the light while you have it, while there is opportunity for you to do so. Trust in Jesus today. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today. And you will be saved. An urgent call to those who as yet have not bowed the knee before King Jesus, who as yet have not put their trust in Jesus. But I think in these words, there's also implicitly an urgent call to those of us who by grace and grace alone are trusting in Jesus.

To those of us who have become sons of light, we are called to shine, to dispel the darkness that hanged so heavily on our city and our society. We are called to share the good news concerning Jesus, the light of the world, to do so to a people living in darkness. And time is running out. The clock is ticking and the midnight hour is approaching. Now is not the time to hide our light under a bushel or under a blanket, but to shine and to shine brightly. We sometimes sing, shine, Jesus, shine. And as the song goes on, we sing and pray, shine on me. And I wonder, I just wonder if Jesus might not be of a mind to interrupt us as we sing and say to us, say to you, what about you? I want you to shine. You are sons of light. And that is what you are to do. You are to shine. Shine, believer, shine. Shine for me. I wonder if these are words that Jesus directs to us even this morning. Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do a thank you for Jesus. We thank you for him. We thank you for who he is, the eternal, a son of God, the one who came into the world as the light of the world. We thank you that he is the one who helps us to see clearly. And we pray that we would see clearly, that we would see you for who you are in all your wonder and glory and majesty and holiness and love and grace, that we would see ourselves in our desperate need of forgiveness and of a Savior, that we would see the way that has been provided for us, a way of salvation, a way whereby we can be brought back into friendship with yourself, the way that has been opened up by Jesus, by his atoning death and calvary in our place. Help us to be ever trusting in him. Help us day by day to know what it is to have a deepening and a richer trust in Jesus and help us to become ever more what we are as sons of light, that our lives would be characterized by goodness and righteousness and truth, that our great desire would be to please you, that we would shine for you in a dark, dark place. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.