

The lamp has come

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[0 : 0 0] Muhammad is eight years old. Ahmed is ten years old. Two little boys. Just for a moment.

You don't know who they are, but you know their names, you know how old they are. What should two little boys like Muhammad and Ahmed be doing? In your own mind, imagine what two little boys should be doing. Until three months ago, Muhammad and Ahmed lived in Syria. And on Thursday, they were interviewed by Quentin Somerville, the BBC Middle East correspondent.

And in that interview, Muhammad and Ahmed told of the multiple beheadings that they had witnessed. They also told with chilling precision of how they'd been taught to use an AK-47 and put on a suicide belt. They were child fighters in training. Ahmed, with good reason, said of IS that they they don't care whether children live or die. Those words, I don't know why those words in particular struck me. They don't care whether children live or die. We live in a dark world.

Of course, in the West, we're much more civilized. And we can look from afar with moral superiority at the barbarians in other lands behaving so abominably. Well, I wonder, last weekend was a Super Bowl.

Some of you won't even know what that's about. Big sporting event in the States. And the big part of that for many isn't so much the sport, but the adverts at halftime. People wait with great expectation what the adverts will be, what will be the most gripping advert at halftime of the Super Bowl.

[2 : 3 0] And it would seem that for many the favorite this year was an advert by Doritos. And in the advert, some of you may have seen this, you see a sonogram. And in the sonogram, a baby is seen reaching for the Doritos that the father has, who's there in the room where the sonogram is being taken.

Just a bit of fun. Not so, protested the National Abortion Rights Action League. This ad, they assured us, was guilty of humanizing fetuses. Now, I'm left a little bit bemused. How can you humanize a human?

You can possibly dehumanize a human. I don't know how you can humanize a human. In Scotland, this past week, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service has called for a liberalization of abortion laws. I didn't know that was possible to further liberalize, but seemingly it is. Of course, that's in the context of the fact that these powers are soon to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Their spokesperson argued the case on the basis that a child in the womb has no human rights. Indeed, in Scotland, the most dangerous place for a child is the womb.

And though from a different continent and a different context, the words of Ahmed come to mind. They don't care whether children live or die. We live in a dark world. We can look afar and we can look around, but we also need to look inside to our own hearts. And when we look inside to our own hearts, what do we find? What do we see? We find selfishness and jealousy and lust and pride and ambition, and we could go on. We live in a dark world. But darkness is not the whole story. There is light.

There is a light that shines, a light that shines brightly, a light that reveals, a light that overcomes. Jesus, in the verses that we've read, poses a tantalizing question that allows us to identify and consider the light that we all stand in such great need of.

[5 : 03] Let's read again what we find there in Mark chapter 4 and verses 21 and 22. He said to them, Jesus said to them, Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed?

Instead, don't you put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. The question posed concerns a lamp. I want to spend a little time thinking about this lamp. What I want to try and do is to establish three truths concerning this lamp that Jesus speaks of. First of all, we want to think about its identity, but then its purpose, and then finally its placement, or its location, where it is best placed or located. These three things, identity, purpose, and location, or placement. First of all, let's think about the identity of the lamp. Well, that in itself seems a strange thing to say. Does a lamp have an identity? I know that some people do give names to inanimate objects. Cars in particular seem to suffer that bizarre fate, not looking at anybody in particular this morning, but a lamp. Well, let's explore this possibility of a lamp with an identity. To do so, we first need to take a step back and remind ourselves of the way in which in the

Old Testament the figure of a lamp is often used as a picture or a metaphor. And it is used in that way in different directions, though all overlapping. The picture of a lamp is used as a metaphor for God.

Listen to what David composes and sings as he gratefully celebrates his deliverance from Saul. We find this not in the book of Psalms, not in 2 Samuel 22 and verse 29. David is addressing God, and he sings in this way, You are my lamp, O Lord. The Lord turns my darkness into light. So the lamp is a metaphor for God himself, and then more commonly as a metaphor for God's Word. We're very familiar with the words of Psalm 119, Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. But then also, and more intriguingly, we find the picture of a lamp being used as a picture for God's Messiah. Now, the Old Testament provides us with a brutally honest description of the caliber of most of the kings of Israel and Judah.

And for so many of them, their epitaph are the solemn words, He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. But in the midst of that dark reality, we read something intriguing in 2 Kings 8 and verse 19.

[8 : 06] Nevertheless, for the sake of his servant David, the Lord was not willing to destroy Judah. He had promised to maintain a lamp for David and his descendants forever.

So that's a little bit of the background of how this picture of a lamp is used in the Bible, and many of Jesus' hearers, of course, would have been familiar with those pictures and that use of the lamp in that way. But what about the lamp that Jesus speaks about here in the question that He poses?

What or who does that lamp represent? In the question that Jesus poses, and here we turn to the vocabulary of the question in verse 21. In that question, there are two key Greek words that are somewhat lost or obscured in translation. A more literal translation of the question that we have there in verse 21 would be along the following lines. And as I suggest the lines along which the translation could be, maybe you could just be glancing at what you have in the Bible to see the slight differences.

Along these lines, does the lamp come in order to be put under a bowl or a bed? Somewhat different the way in which we're suggesting those words could be understood or translated.

I don't know if you noticed a couple of the differences. Well, we'll start with one of them, and that's the first verb in the question. In our translation, we're told that the lamp is brought.

[9 : 40] Do you bring in a lamp? Of course, by posing the question in that way, there is the implication of an owner or of the one who carries the lamp and brings in the lamp to the dark room. But the actual verb that Mark uses in recording what Jesus says is more commonly translated as to come. It's a verb more suited to describe the actions of a person than an object. Indeed, the same verb is used to describe Jesus in the very first chapter of this gospel. In Mark chapter 1 and verse 7, in the context of what John the Baptist had to say about Jesus. And what did John the Baptist say? This was his message, After me will come one more powerful than I. Of course, he was speaking of Jesus. Jesus was going to come. And here the lamp also comes, something that lamps generally don't do. People do that.

So that's the first word for you to notice. There's a second word, and it's just a little word, and it's the word the. In our translation, we have an indefinite article before the lamp. Do you bring in a lamp? The article that we actually have there is the definite article. Does the lamp come into the room to be hidden under a bowl or to be placed under a bed? So the verb, to come, hints at the lamp representing a person. And the definite article, the lamp, points to a particular person.

I think the conclusion is inescapable. Jesus is speaking about himself in the first instance, that it could be then developed in other ways, no doubt. But in the first instance, Jesus is speaking about himself. He is the lamp that has come into this dark world. Now, we can say that. We can declare it.

It's not news, really, to most of us here this morning. But I think sometimes we do need to just pause and ponder and try to grasp how huge this statement is, that Jesus is the lamp, the light, who has come into the world, this dark world. Maybe we can try and ponder on the scale of that observation or that statement in the light of the big news that we've all been hearing about in this past week. And it is seriously big news, this detection of gravitational waves made by observatories in North America. I think they were detected a few months ago, but I guess all these things need to be tested before the announcement is made. But in this past week, the announcement was made.

And these waves, these gravitational waves were produced, we are assured, by very clever people, some 1.3 billion years ago by the merger of two black holes. They crashed. You can just almost picture it, the waves that would then flow from this great encounter of these two black holes.

[13 : 01] Now, this ability to detect gravitational waves is huge. It opens a new window on the universe.

Until now, light has allowed us to see the universe with ways we can now listen in to our cosmic past. It is huge. And yet, without for a moment minimizing the cosmic importance, of these cosmic ripples reaching our little planet, let me suggest that the coming of Jesus, the creator of the cosmos, the one who has come from outside the cosmos, the cosmos that He created into the cosmos and to our little planet, is news that is beyond cosmic in proportions.

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, the one who describes Himself as the light of the world, has come into our dark world.

This is huge. This isn't a cosmic ripple. This is a cosmic revolution. The identity of the lamp. The lamp has come into the darkness.

But we also need to consider, in the light of the question that Jesus poses, excuse me, the purpose of the lamp. Now, without reference to the text, we could list any number of purposes served by a lamp, by light.

[14 : 42] But we need to limit ourselves to what is directly suggested in these two verses, verses 21 and 22. I think the first thing that's directly suggested or implied is the reality of darkness.

The picture of a lamp being brought into a room or coming into a room, and that the need for that lamp presupposes darkness.

You don't turn lights on in a light-filled room. Well, some people do in my house, but that's another matter. You don't have to turn lights on in a light-filled room.

So, implicit, excuse me, in the question that Jesus poses is this reality of darkness. There is darkness that needs to be dispelled.

But there's another element to this. It's not just darkness. There's also the reality of hiddenness. In what Jesus says in verse 22, He speaks of that which is hidden being disclosed.

[15 : 48] It's not exactly the same as darkness. Darkness aids, if you wish, the hiddenness. But it's a different category. There's darkness that needs to be dispelled, but there's also hiddenness.

There is that which is hidden. And in the question that's posed, and in what Jesus announces will happen, there is an acknowledgement that there are truths and realities that are hidden, hidden in great measure by the very darkness that is being spoken of.

So, given the above, what is the purpose of the lamp? What is the purpose of the light that shines from that lamp? Well, it is to reveal and to overcome, to reveal what is hidden and to overcome the darkness.

We think, first of all, of this lamp revealing. What is it that is hidden, that is revealed by the coming and by the person of Jesus?

Well, I think the first thing we can say is that Jesus reveals the heart of God. Now, God was not, before the coming of Jesus, altogether hidden.

[16 : 57] By no means. He is a God who has made Himself known from the very creation of the cosmos. So, from the very beginning, God is a God who has made Himself known. And yet, it is true that there is a real sense in which, until the coming of Jesus, God was in great measure hidden.

And in the coming of Jesus, the hiddenness of God is made visible. He is disclosed in a way that He had never disclosed Himself before.

We're reminded of the words of Jesus to Philip, recorded in John's Gospel in chapter 14, Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

To see Jesus is to see God in a way that He cannot be seen and recognized in any other way. In Jesus, and especially at the cross, we see most beautifully the grace and love of God.

At the cross, we are also confronted most eloquently and powerfully with the holiness and justice of God. Jesus reveals the heart of God.

[18 : 15] But Jesus also reveals the heart of men and women, your heart and my heart. He reveals your heart by contrast to His own, as it's revealed by the life that He lived.

He reveals your heart by His teaching that reaches and exposes our hearts in all their darkness. But Jesus also reveals the way back to God.

How are sinners with dark hearts to enjoy friendship and fellowship with a God whose heart is altogether pure? Well, Jesus is the light that shows us the way back to God.

And that light shines from Himself onto Himself. He is the way back to God. Jesus reveals that which is hidden.

But Jesus, the light of the world, overcomes the darkness. Now, this aspect is maybe less prominent in the question posed, but it's not absent.

[19 : 24] The question, and what follows in verse 22, has a note that is full of hope, even triumphant. The light will, in time, overcome.

Whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed. Whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. It will happen, says Jesus. Maybe not happening now.

You can't see it now. But it will happen. Light will overcome. That which is hidden will be seen. The darkness will not prevail. Some of you who were here last Sunday morning will remember how our preacher, Logan, was stressing this reality as he considered John's prologue.

Chapter 1, verse 5. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Indeed, we could put that in the reverse way.

The light will overcome the darkness. It's not simply defensive that it won't be overcome, but that the light, in turn, will overcome the darkness.

[20 : 31] And for disciples then, who are hearing this question being posed by Jesus, and for disciples now, for you and me, this is important. The disciples had hoped that Jesus would definitively overcome the darkness in a manner that was immediate and visible and dramatic.

But that is not the way of Jesus. That is not the way of the kingdom of God. The victory is assured, but it becomes altogether visible and fully consummated only in God's good time.

The purpose of the Lamb, to reveal and to overcome. But then also in the question posed, we can give some thought to the placement of the Lamb. Where do you place a Lamb?

Well, Jesus gives suggestions that are intended to be ridiculous, that are intended to be almost comical. Do you place the Lamb under a bowl? Do you place the Lamb under a bed?

I was thinking of what would happen if I were to try this out, these questions, try them out in situ, as it were, with a small child.

[21 : 44] Imagine if I went into a dark room with a small child, a child of two or three years old, no more. And I go into the room, and I've got this lamp, and it's a dark room.

And I say to the little child, I say it's a wee boy, and I say to the wee boy, shall we put this under the bowl? And what would the child say? That's silly. That's silly, Daddy, assuming he was my son.

Or if I said to the child, well, why don't we put the lamp under the bed? Is that a good idea? The child would look in disbelief and say, well, that's just silly.

That's just silly. Don't do that. The lamp, to be effective and fulfill its purpose, has to be in a place of prominence. And if we apply this to Jesus, the lamp, the light, what does this mean?

Or what implications does it point to? I think one implication is maybe not so immediately obvious. Some of you might think it's stretching the picture somewhat.

[22 : 49] And, you know, you're within your rights if that's what you think. But I think it is here. The lamp on a stand asserts, reminds us that Jesus is not subordinate to anything or anyone, but is supreme over all.

We need to see and understand everything in the light of Jesus. Our dark world, your dark heart, even the gravitational waves that ripple from 1.3 billion years ago, if indeed that is how long it's taken them, through to our little world, need to be seen and explored and understood in the light of Jesus, of who He is.

But perhaps more evidently, the lamp on a stand points to our responsibility to make Jesus visible. Now, Jesus, of course, when He came into the world, made Himself visible.

He shone in this world. But we know that most people didn't see Him. They didn't see the light. He came. And He was and is the light, but most didn't see it.

But His light continues to shine in and through His people. I think it does so in two ways. First of all, as we make Jesus known, as we point people to the light of the world, as we lift Him up, that He might be clearly seen.

- [24 : 27] And we have to lift Him up to that place of prominence and visibility, that He might be seen. But also, as we reflect His light in our lives and in our communities of faith as the people of God, each of us where we are, but together, reflecting the light of Jesus.
- Jesus, you are a beacon in a dark world. We, as Bon Accord, are to be a beacon in a dark city.
- I'm reminded of the words of the chorus, this little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. But it's not my light. It's the light of Jesus reflected in and through me.
- We really need to think about this. Time doesn't allow us to think about it as much as we ought. But how do we, as a congregation, as Bon Accord, make Jesus known in our dark world?
- Or do we hide Him under a bowl? Do we hide Him under the bed? And that's not just silly. It's wicked and cruel.
- [25 : 48] In your life, do you lift up Jesus to a place of prominence and visibility? Do you, in your life and conversation, reflect Jesus to others?
- We thought a little bit then about the identity, the purpose, the placement of the Lamb. But the text continues in verse 23 through to verse 25.
- And just very fleetingly, we want to think about what Jesus goes on to say in the verses that follow. And everything that He says and what follows has to do with your response to Jesus as the light of the world.
- The first question I need to pose you, it's a very simple and obvious one, but it's there before us inescapably. Are you hearing?
- If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. This is the challenge that Jesus lays out time and time again in these verses, in this passage.
- [26 : 55] If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. Are you hearing what God is saying through His Word concerning who Jesus is and what Jesus has come to do and what Jesus can do for you?
- Are you considering carefully what you hear? Consider carefully what you hear. Jesus addresses those words today to you.
- Consider carefully what you hear. what are the implications of what you're hearing this morning in your life.
- What are the implications of what you're hearing this morning for how you will live tomorrow when you go to college, when you go to work, when you plan your week ahead.
- Consider carefully what you hear. If you consider carefully what is said here concerning Jesus, if you recognize that what is said concerning Jesus is true, if you come into the light of Jesus, embracing Jesus as your Savior and Lord, then the measure of light and understanding you now have will grow and deepen.
- [28 : 18] This is what Jesus is saying. If you come to Me, if you're close to Me, if you're close to the light, then what you know now, it will grow. You'll know more. What you have, more will be given you.
- But if you stand aloof, if you reject the light and opt to remain in the shadows of unbelief, on the outside, looking in at a safe distance as you see it from Jesus and commitment to Jesus, then not only will you remain in the darkness, but even that glimmer of light that you now have will be taken from you.
- The lamp has come. The light has come into a dark world to reveal and to overcome. May we all know what it is to see in Jesus the light of the world who reveals to us the heart of God in our heart and through whom we can come to know God and to be friends with God and to be reconciled with God.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word and we thank you for Jesus. We thank you for your Son. We thank you for the one in whom all things hold together.

We thank you for the one who has created the cosmos. We thank you that in him everything can be understood in its place.

[29 : 52] We pray that you would enable us to so see the world and so see our own lives in the light of Jesus. In the light of who he is in the light of what he has done and continues to do.

And we pray that this light that we read of and that Jesus speaks of would indeed be the light that would more and more reveal that which is hidden and overcome the darkness that hangs so heavily in this world that we live in.

And we pray in his name. Amen.