

## 4: Walking in the light



*Dura Synagogue, David anointed by Samuel, 3rd Century*

### Starter

When faced with an important task or 'project' either at home or church, what's a sensible approach to take?

### Key verse

'For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.' (Ephesians 5:8)

### In the dark

(Read 1 Sam 16:1-13)

Samuel might well be an important prophet and a man of faith, but that didn't stop him from doing a risk analysis of any task that God gave him.

As the reading starts, Samuel is still mourning for Saul, a king who God had rejected and was now ready to replace from Jesse's offspring in Bethlehem.

The big risk would be that the rejected Saul might learn of this development and kill Samuel on his journey to Bethlehem. So, God provides a distraction, the need of a heifer for the sacrificial ceremony accompanying the anointing, which itself would be by invite only (from among Jesse's family and Bethlehem's elders).

This was to be a very low-key celebration, not to be made public for some years.

Samuel knows this is his responsibility so is obedient to the call, brushing aside the worries of the local community and assuring them that this is a peaceful visit and inviting the civic leaders along to the sacrificial offering.

Whether it was Samuel wanting to get this over quickly that causes him to struggle to recognise God's anointed one, or a lesson that needed to be learned is unclear, but none of the seven presented to him are 'the one', leaving just the youngest son, the teenager David, who is out in the fields tending his father's sheep.

Samuel looked at David and saw a rugged young shepherd boy. God saw more and this was the one he had chosen for the task. It's worth remembering that Jesus also saw beyond the exterior appearance of a person

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and understood where their heart really was (as with the Pharisees in Matthew 23:27).

David is anointed with oil in the presence of witnesses, and in this action also receives the anointing of the Holy Spirit. God begins to work in David's life even though it will be some time before he ascends to the throne (recorded in 2 Samuel. chapters 2 and 5).

Job done, Samuel heads back to his home in Ramah and plays no further active role in either 1 or 2 Samuel, the anointing of David being the major achievement of his career.

- Q 1 Samuel seems to have been working in the dark here, assessing each of Jesse's sons and trusting that God would give him the knowledge and wisdom to enable him to put to aside his own opinion and choose the right one. Can you imagine yourself in the same position and how you might feel? Have you had similar experiences of having to totally depend on God?
- Q 2 There's a possibility of someone being appointed to a position of power when their heart is not in the right place to properly fulfil the role. Is that just a problem that Samuel faced, and if not, is there a solution?
- Q 3 Samuel, like David, was only a boy when called by God (1 Samuel 3). Ought the Church to be encouraging more of its young people to explore their own calling, and how could this be better achieved locally?
- Q 4 David, though brave, courageous and wise, proved himself to be also fully capable of falling into temptation and sin (as with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11). Does that mean he was the wrong choice, and God made a mistake?

## Children of the light

(Read Ephesians 5:8-14)

Wherever the apostles worked, they came up against the twin obstacles of Judaism and Paganism. Jews were in most of the bigger towns and cities they visited, along with their synagogues.

Outside of their homeland there would also be temples devoted to the worship of Idols. In Ephesus, a Greek city, the worship of Diana along with the practice of magic was a strong influence over the population, and the magnificent temple of Diana was at the centre of city life.

The Jewish religion was fixed, and wherever Paul went he found Jews who were just like he used to be and had similar conversations with them. But pagan beliefs were various, and opposition to Christianity varied with the gods they worshipped and their philosophies, education and morals. All these views had to be addressed and overcome if Christianity was to grow and flourish.

Paul saw the pagan life as living in the dark, and the Christian live as living in the light, but

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here he goes further and says the pagans are dark and the Christians are light!

Light, he says, produces good fruit; a generosity of spirit, knowledge of what is right and wrong, and a way of living that connects both with God and neighbour. All our motives and actions should be tested in the light of Christ and being exposed to this light helps others navigate toward the light.

The last three lines of this passage may be part of an early poem, hymn or song, familiar to Paul's readers but now lost. It has been suggested that these words may have accompanied the ceremony of baptism, said as the converts rose out of the water and symbolising passing from the sleep of paganism to the life of Christ.

- Q 5 Thinking about the culture within your local town or city, would you feel comfortable applying the description of dark and light that Paul uses to individuals, or more generally to the difference between worldly and Godly values?
- Q 6 Should the Christian Church as a whole, and at local level, be more outspoken in speaking out against those things it sees as detrimental to society and against Christian principles?
- Q 7 Paul and the apostles were working in a different environment than we might find ourselves in, but is there a modern equivalent of the pagan worship of idols that any mission work today might have to confront?

## I was blind and now I see!

(Read John 9:1-41)

This story begins with the disciples asking Jesus something we might think as preposterous, that this man's blindness could be caused either by his own sin in the womb or the sin of his parents, but both were beliefs of certain Jews in the time of Jesus. That a parents' sin might be inherited by their offspring is a concept found within the Old Testament (Exodus 20:5 says; 'I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation...')

William Barclay comments on this, saying that when we sin, it can set in motion a train of consequences which seemingly has no end.

Jesus sidesteps the question and looks at this affliction as one that gives an opportunity for God's glory to be seen, a central theme of John's



Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Healing of the Blind Man*, c1310

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Gospel. In the other gospels the miracles seem to be a demonstration of Jesus' compassion, but there's no conflict here as God's glory is revealed both in the miracle as well as in any love and compassion shown. Giving sight to the blind was also predicted as a Messianic activity (Isaiah 35:5).

Jesus uses the methods of the day in handling the situation, which may have helped gain the confidence of the blind man. Spittle was a well-established treatment in the ancient world for a wide range of ailments, but here the man knows in his heart that this healing really comes from Jesus. Not a view expressed by the Pharisees who are more concerned that this all happened on the Sabbath, and therefore Jesus could not be from God. They even express doubts that a healing occurred.

The (formerly blind) man can only shrug his shoulders and say, 'All I know is that I was blind, and now I see!' before lecturing the Pharisees on their poor understanding of all that was happening around them, which gets him thrown out on the street.

Jesus finds him again and continues the healing process, this time of the man's soul.

The final two verses reveal a different blindness, this time spiritual. 'What?' ask the Pharisees. 'Are we blind too?'

The Pharisees were full of knowledge and claimed to be enlightened, and yet they failed to see the light of the world, as Jesus called himself when he appeared among them (v 5). Compare this to the blind man, who is a lovely example of how someone might come to faith.

Q 8 How does the comment from William Barclay speak into your experience, and does it help in understanding the quote from Exodus 20?

Q 9 Does Jesus' use of a traditional healing method have anything to say to the way we look at our national health services, and modern scientific understanding of illness and disability?

Q 10 How well do the man's parents come out of this story?

Q 11 What pattern do you see within this story as to how the blind man came to faith?

## To ponder and pray

Pray both for those like Samuel, seeking God's will, and also for all known to us in need of the healing and compassion of God in their lives.

'The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.' (Helen Keller)

'Beyond a doubt truth bears the same relation to falsehood as light to darkness.' (Leonardo da Vinci)