

SUNDAY SCHOOL NOTES: 19 February 2017

Here's another way to put it: You are here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you there on a hilltop, on a lampstand – shine! (The Message Matt 14-16)

When I got up the other morning I was surprised by how dark it was. Then I realised that our street lights were all off. This helped me to imagine what it must have been like to live long ago, before there were electric lights. I could flick a switch and produce light, but in Bible times to get light one had to have fire, and fire takes a while to get going.

When God led his people out of Egypt, he organised for them to be set free in the middle of the night. The Egyptians had suffered all sorts of disasters because they wouldn't let God's people free. The last and most terrible was that the eldest child in every family died. The Egyptians then decided they really didn't want the Israelites around any longer and sent the message: "Get out, now. Go! We don't want you here any longer."

Imagine the scene: God's people knew something was going to happen that night. They had packed up their homes; everyone was dressed ready for travelling; they even ate their meal in Egypt without waiting for the bread to rise. For the children this must have been an adventure. However, perhaps the mums and dads worried about how they would know where to go, about bumping into things and dropping things in the dark and about the fact that the children might get separated from them during the night.

But they needn't have worried. There in front of them was a huge pillar of fire which moved in front of them and showed them which way to travel. The fire was a sign that God was going with them and stayed with the group for 40 years until they arrived in the Promised Land. When they were to camp, the fire stood still. When they were to travel, God's fire moved.

Years later the people still talked about this. Parents told the children who were too small to remember, and those children told their children, etc. Even today the Jewish people celebrate this part of their history.

In Jesus' day they used to celebrate this at a most joyful festival, The Feast of Tabernacles (or Shelters). They would build a shelter out of branches and live in that, instead of in their homes, for 8 days! The priests would light the 4 big menorah candlesticks in the temple each night and, because there were no street lights, these 28 candles would light up the city so it could be seen from far away. Then the people would dance and sing in thankfulness.

We know that Jesus attended this festival and it was while he was there that he said "I am the Light of the World. No-one who follows me will stumble around in the dark. I will give

them all the light they need.” (John 8:12) The people of God knew that God had been the fire-light in the wilderness; they expected another light because God’s messengers had told them that God’s light would come. But, when Jesus said this, the people were shocked! What did Jesus mean?

He was telling them that he was the same God who had been in the fire, leading his people. He was saying that God’s love was breaking up the darkness of our world. If they followed him as their forefathers had followed the pillar of fire, they would no longer have to muddle along ‘walking in darkness’. Even today God is with us, showing us his love and offering to guide us.

When Matthew wrote his story of the ‘good news’ of Jesus, he remembered what Jesus had said at that feast of light. But he also told his readers that Jesus said something else about light: “You are the light of the world”.

Now isn’t that a contradiction? Earlier Jesus had said that he was the light of the world – now he says *we (his followers)* are the light of the world. NO! We are to be reflectors to show today’s world what Jesus was like so that everyone could learn that God is great and good.

It is no use loving Jesus and hiding it away. You can’t hide the city lights! The lamps lit at the feast of the tabernacle were visible from far away. And that was the idea. We don’t light a lamp and then shove it under something – it is meant to be used so that we get a clearer picture of what is going on.

So get shining! Let other people see through you what Jesus was like.

PUZZLE

The end of the last book in the whole Bible tells us what heaven is like. Look at Revelation ch 22:5 and see if you can answer these 3 questions for 25 bonus marks per question. (If you learn the verse off by heart you will get 100 bonus points.)

What won’t we have in heaven?

What won’t we need in heaven?

Why not?