

16. Jesus, the Light of the World

John 8:12-30

The Gospel According to John

I Am *The* Light of the World

Verse 20 of this passage helps us picture the scene we are studying today. The event described here takes place upon the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, on the eastern side in the Court of the Women where the trumpet-shaped bronze offering receptacles were kept near the treasury. According to the *Mishnah* (Middoth 2, 5), the Court of the Women was just over 200 feet square with a colonnade running around the court. I want you to picture this scene with me as Jesus is about to make an important declaration about Himself. He is also going to make an invitation that will echo down the ages, to this very day, to you and me.

The passage itself does not tell us when this interchange took place between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, but we can presume that it is later during the last day of the Fall festival called the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) (John 7:37). There were two great ceremonies on this last day of the feast. The first one was that same morning with the pouring out of the water on the Altar of Burnt Offering. At that time, just after the crowd had shouted to the priest to lift high the chalice containing the water and before he poured it upon the altar, Jesus shouted out for all to hear, **“If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him”** (John 7:37-38).

The Lord spoke of Himself as being the One out of which the water of life would flow. This reference to flowing water brings to mind the instance where Moses brought forth water from the rock. In the same way, we see that the Messiah was to be smitten, and from the Rock (Psalm 18:2) of His life is poured out a river of life, viz. the Holy Spirit (John 7:39; Exodus 17:6). Later that day as the sun went down, a second ceremony had begun called the Illumination of the Temple. In the temple courts, the Court of the Women had four large lamps or candelabras. The *Mishnah* (Sukkah 5:2-3) tells us that each lamp had four great golden bowls with a ladder at each, thus enabling the younger priests to climb up and fill the bowls with oil and set them alight when it got dark. It must have been an impressive sight.

Because the Temple Mount was at a high point in the city, it is said that the blaze of the lamps lit up most of Jerusalem. During the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jewish people were commanded by God to celebrate for seven days (Numbers 29:12), so all night long there was dancing and rejoicing before the Lord. More than likely as the lamps were lit, Jesus spoke the second of the seven *“I Am”* statements found in the Gospel of John. We looked at the first *“I Am”* when Christ said, *“I Am the Bread of Life”* (John 6: 35, 48, 51), i.e., an allusion to Jesus' being the heavenly manna, which God, through Moses, gave to the children of Israel. The manna served as a shadow picture of the True Bread that God would provide. As the day began to fade and the young men lit the lamps, Jesus now told them that He is the true light of the world, i.e., the One who would bring men out of the darkness (John 1:4-5):

¹²When 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." ¹³The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid." ¹⁴Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going." ¹⁵You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. ¹⁶But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. ¹⁷In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. ¹⁸I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me." ¹⁹Then they asked him, "Where is your father?" "You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." ²⁰He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come (John 8:21-20).

Notice that He didn't say, I am a light or even one of the lights, but the statement is exclusive, "I am *the* light of the world" (v. 12). The Pharisee's were listening, which again says a lot about the character of Jesus. He didn't say these things just to His disciples. He spoke to all people as to Who He was and is, whether they were for Him or against Him. These things were not spoken privately, but Christ courageously spoke the truth about His identity, regardless of the repercussions of His statements. The Pharisee's immediately challenged Him because they understood that it was a claim to divinity. The Lord had spoken to them many times that He was their light, "The Lord is my light" (Psalm 27:1). "The Lord will be your everlasting light" (Isaiah 60:19). "By his light, I walked through darkness" (Job 29:3).

When God dealt with the Egyptian nation because of their enslavement of the Israelites, one of the ten plagues that fell on Egypt was thick darkness that came upon all of Egypt, but where the Israelites lived, they had light:

²¹Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt." ²²So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. ²³No one could see anyone else or move about for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived (Exodus 10:21-23).

After their deliverance from Egypt, when Pharaoh and his soldiers chased them to wipe out Israel at the Red Sea, God brought darkness to the Egyptians, but to the Israelite side, there was light for them to cross the Sea on dry ground (Exodus 14:19-20). Paul, the Apostle, wrote that Christ was the Angel of the Lord, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, who watched over Israel providing them bread from heaven, water from the rock, and light in the darkness while they crossed the Red Sea:

¹For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ²They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from **the spiritual rock** that accompanied them, and **that rock was Christ** (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

Question 1) What did Jesus mean when He said, “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness?” (Verse 12). What did Jesus mean by “light” and “darkness?”

Christ is *THE* Light to All Nations, Not Just Israel

In a prophetic word about God’s Suffering Servant, the Messiah, Isaiah prophesied:

And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—⁶he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; **I will make you as a light for the nations**, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:5-6).

Not only is the Lord Jesus the Light of Israel, but also He is the Light of all nations. From the very beginning of time, God planned to bring forth from all nations a bride for His Son. He’d spoken this promise to Abraham: ²“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and **all peoples on earth will be blessed through you**” (Genesis 12:2-3). All nations of the earth were to be partakers of the heavenly blessing that includes you, dear reader.

Hopefully, you have come to a point in your life where you are asking the big questions about life, “Who am I? Why am I here? What reason do I have for living? Where am I going?” These kinds of questions can be depressing if you do not know the Light of the World, Jesus the Christ. When a person is in darkness, he cannot see the next step before him. One stumbles around, trying to find out where to go.

In the same way, a person who comes to Christ begins to understand who he is, why he is living, and where he is going. Light is a picture of knowledge; whereas, darkness speaks of ignorance and the things of this world. The more light or understanding a person acquires, the less stumbling he experiences as he walks through this life. The light also speaks of illumination, of seeing a truth that was hidden before. The light will draw you upward and lift your spirit. Darkness keeps people in bondage and obscures the truth.□

There are times in our lives when we go through great difficulties when everything seems dark, but no matter what darkness we have to walk through, Christ will be our light. When we lose a loved one, and it looks as if the darkness is crowding in, when we are sick and want to lie in bed, or even hope to die, it is often because we have no hope and no light—no reason to live. These are the times when God wants to reveal Himself to you in a particular and personal way if you will seek Him and ask Him. He will not come where He is not invited. He has given each of us the will to choose to walk towards the light or to stay in darkness. Coming to Him and learning of Him will bring us much light to walk through difficult times. We are to seek to know Him intimately. It is written of Jesus, “***by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities***” (Isaiah 53:11).

Many people experience darkness in their lives as they follow their desires and stumble through life with no direction, not having any knowledge of God. It is in periods of darkness that God speaks and draws people to Himself. However, there are also Christians who have suffered through dark times. Those who follow Christ find that, even in the periods of life when great trials come, the Lord is with us and has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us. Jesus said: **“Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness”** (v. 12). We are to submit ourselves to His guidance and take our direction from His model of living, listening to His voice, and meditating on His Word.

There are many times in life when those who are walking with Him undergo painful situations, which God uses as teaching times to increase our capacity and strengthen us. God is teaching perseverance and creating the likeness of the character of Christ in us. These unpleasant situations are caused, not by our forsaking Him, but because we *are* walking closely with Him. The Scripture says, **“The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all”** (Psalm 34:19). It is not enough to look at this light during our troubles or even to gaze on Him. We must follow hard after Him, for His light is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). We would all like to see further down the road of life and know what is coming our way, but God has only promised light for the next step, not the next mile or the next year. “Why is that?” you may ask? The reason is that He wants us to trust Him in the difficult times of darkness.

I went through three and a half years when I could not receive wages as a pastor in Cincinnati while I went through four immigration trials that lasted throughout those years. That situation came about because I had confessed to two minor marijuana convictions on my Immigration forms for residency after I married Sandy, my American wife, in 1980. The marijuana convictions were committed in England when I was seventeen and twenty-one years of age, several years before I became a Christian. Both of these convictions were being held against me, even though one of them was committed when I was a minor. I was not eligible for a green card because of these convictions.

As a family, we had left everything behind in England and our children were finishing school. The school systems in England and America are very different, and we did not want to disrupt our children's education at that time. We had hoped to spend some time with my wife's family as she had been apart from them for almost twenty years. Every day seemed dark while I went through the Immigration Court process. Immigration threatened me that, if I didn't leave the United States voluntarily, I could be forcibly removed and sent back to my home country of England and would not be able to reapply for a work visa for ten years.

I had two lawyers; both of them told me that for us to stay in the USA as a family was not possible. They both said to me that they could not get me a residency visa for the USA and that it was impossible to reverse the decision because the exceptions that the law allowed did not apply to me, given the particular details of my situation. The most that they could do, they said, was to give me time and drag it out. I had to trust God for finances for more than three years while I continued to do my regular job but as a volunteer. I took it one day at a time and looked to His light during my pain and confusion as to what He wanted me to do. Each Immigration Court

appearance brought further disappointment as a decision was put off until several months later. This time of darkness seemed as if it would never end.

At the fourth court appearance, I broke down and pleaded with the judge not to let this continue much longer because of the hardship that my family had to endure. It was a terrible experience as it caused uncertainty and depression for our two children as well. It had been a long battle, and we were all drained. Right at the end of that time, the court proceedings took a turn, and God supplied a miracle that gave me the Resident Visa that I needed. It was an unexpected turn, a remarkable decision. My immigration lawyer, who had many years of experience said he had never seen a favorable verdict in this type of situation, given the details. We said it was our miracle, and he agreed.

Question 2) What years of your life have been the darkest and why? What happened to bring light?

Light vs. Darkness

There is often a clash of kingdoms when the light is manifest. Earlier that day at the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jews had witnessed Jesus' testimony about His being the giver of the living water (John 7:38), the love and mercy towards the woman caught in the act of adultery (John 8:1-11), and now they hear Christ's testimony about Himself, i.e., that He is *the* Light of the world. His statement of being the light of the world brought another attack from the Jewish leadership. When the light of God is made manifest, those called of God will come to the light; whereas, those who set themselves against the light draw back into darkness: □

¹⁹This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God (John 3:19-21).

There are those drawn to the light, but there are also those who pull away. For various reasons, some people drawback for a time, but later come to the light because they saw something that attracted them. For example, Saul the persecutor of Christianity, i.e., the one who became the Apostle Paul, when he witnessed the stoning to death of Stephen, saw him praying for his persecutors with his face shining with the glory of God. “All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15). God began to deal with Saul from that point onward. When the Lord confronted Saul on the Damascus road, He said to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goad” (Acts 26:14). The goad was a long stick with a pointed end that was prodded the oxen to make them work instead of standing still. The Lord was prodding Saul/Paul, i.e., stirring his innermost being with thoughts about faith in Christ. The prodding was a result of the light that Saul saw on the face of Stephen.

When you stand up for your faith and shine forth the light and joy of Jesus Christ, you will find some who are interested and hungry and thirsty for more, but you will also find many who

initially hesitate and those who respond with great anger. We see this illustrated in the life of Jesus when His ministry on earth reached the point where He was to be sacrificed for the sins of the world. Here in this passage, we see the rejection among the Pharisees and the religious leaders of the day. In his excellent commentary, Chuck Swindoll brings out the stages of darkness that those who refused Christ went through as they rejected the Light of the World. It started as rejection, then accusation, and finally culminated in violence:

1. Contradiction. "Your witness is not true" (verse 13).
2. Cynicism. "Where is your father? We were not born of fornication (8:19, 41).
3. Denial. "We have never enslaved anyone" (verse 33).
4. Insult. "You are a Samaritan. You have a demon" (verse 48).
5. Sarcasm. "Who do you make yourself out to be?" (verse 53).
6. Violence. "They took up stones to throw at Him" (verse 59).¹

Question 3) Have you ever had someone respond to you out of their darkness? Have you ever had a sense that the enemy spoke through a friend? Share your thoughts; why did they respond to Jesus this way?

The Consequences of Rejection of Christ

²¹Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come." ²²This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?" ²³But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." ²⁵"Who are you?" they asked. "Just what I have been claiming all along," Jesus replied. ²⁶"I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world." ²⁷They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. ²⁸So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. ²⁹The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." ³⁰Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him (John 8:21-30).

I would remind the reader that Jesus is not talking to the general populace but the Jewish religious leadership in opposition to Him. He told them, "Where I go, you cannot come" (v. 21). Unless there is repentance, those opposing Him will die in their sins, for there is only one way to God, i.e., through the substitutionary Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus. The Light of God was in front of them, but they instead drew back into darkness and rejected the light that God had brought them in Christ. He told them that they would look for Him (v. 21), i.e., something that still goes on today among Jewish people as they are still searching for their Messiah. Today, most Jews still refuse to believe that He has come to them, but a day is coming when many eyes are opened to the truth that Jesus is, indeed, their Messiah, Who comes to bring the light and to be the river of Life to them.

¹ Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll's New Testament Insights on John*, Zondervan Publishers, 2010, Page 167.

Life has many opportunities that come to us. There are opportunities to make money, to go into business, to take a step up in one's work, to educate oneself further, etc., but individual opportunities may not return. The Pharisees that were opposing Christ had a chance at that time to come to the Light of Christ, but they chose to harden their hearts to the invitation. The trouble with closing our hearts to the love of Christ and the Gospel is that, if we do get another opportunity, the voice becomes quieter because our hearts become hardened towards Him. God often has to break us to soften our hearts enough to receive His word.

Jesus told them that they would die in their sin (v. 21). He said He was going away and that there would come a time when they would look for Him and that it would be too late, for the door of salvation would shut, and they would not be able to enter. Many believe that this life is all there is and that, when they die, that's it! How the enemy of God, Satan, loves that kind of thinking! However, life is not really like that. We are eternal creatures that only inhabit a body for a certain amount of time as God determines. Every day is an opportunity to get to know the Savior and be changed into His image and character (2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 8:29).

To make sure that those in front of Him knew precisely what they were doing in rejecting the light, He repeated what He was saying. **"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins"** (v. 24). He was categorically claiming to be the Messiah Sin Bearer of Israel, i.e., the One who was prophesied to take away their sins, the Suffering Servant spoken about by the prophet Isaiah, chapter 53, i.e., spoken more than 500 years earlier. To die in your sins and reject God's free payment for sin means that you have to pay with your eternal life yourself, forever rejected. How sad! The writer of the Book of Hebrews puts it this way, **"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"** (Hebrews 10:31). There are those who believe that, if they miss the rapture of the Church, there will be a second chance, albeit a tough time while they go through the Tribulation of the last days. I believe this to be a false hope that would make it very dangerous if a person accepts such a message.

²³Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, ²⁴"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵**Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading,** 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' ²⁶"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷"But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' ²⁸"There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. ²⁹People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last" (Luke 13:23-30).

We must take our opportunity to receive the light while the door of salvation is open. I don't find the slightest hope in the passage above that the possibility that is open today will still be good at the coming of Christ for His Church. Once the owner of the house gets up, the door of salvation is closed, never to be opened again! Many will try to enter that day, realizing that there is a God

and that there is an eternity before all of us. Do not put off your response till tomorrow to God's offer of a pardon for your sins, for sin has a way of hardening your heart. If today your heart is open to Him, is there any good reason as to why you shouldn't receive His full and free salvation? What would stop you? It is madness to draw back into the darkness (Ecclesiastes 9:3).

Question 4) What did Jesus mean when He said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one?" (John 8:28).

It is possible that those who were resistant to His loving and gracious words were some of the very ones who would be around the cross, approving His sentence of death. At the cross, there were those who were hardened in their rejection of Him: "The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One'" (Luke 23:35). But imagine what it was like when He cried out from the cross in a loud voice the words, "It is finished" (John 19:30). I wonder what these same people thought when they experienced the earthquake at His death? There was darkness over all the land, and the temple curtain that separated man from God's presence was torn in two from top to bottom. The tombs opened around them, and many holy people were raised to life, coming out of their graves and walking around Jerusalem for all to see (Matthew 27:50-54). Can you imagine such a sight? Those who were keeping watch over Jesus were filled with awe, and the centurion exclaimed, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" I think many of them, at last, knew then that He is the Messiah. Have you come to this realization yet? What will it take for you to believe?

Jesus, God in human form, came into the world to save sinners, such as you and me. He came to pay the debt of sin that we owe. He came to deliver you and me from the guilt and shame of sin and to give us the gift of eternal life. I trust that you, too, have seen that, before a holy God, you see yourself in need of a Savior. Light has come into the world, but do you love the darkness more than the Light of the World? He has said that to respond to the Gospel and receive the gift of life, you need to welcome Him into your life:

To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me (Revelation 3:20).

Will you receive Him today as Savior and Lord of your life? Entrust your whole being to Him with a simple prayer, such as the following:

Prayer: "Father, I have broken Your law, and my sins have separated me from You. I am truly sorry, and I want to turn away from my sinful life toward You. Please forgive me and help me to walk with You. I believe that Your Son, Jesus Christ, died for my sins, was resurrected from the dead, is alive, and hears my prayer. I invite You, Lord Jesus, to become the Lord of my life, to rule and reign in my heart from this day forward. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit to help me obey You and to do Your will. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen."

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