

“I Am the Light” | John 8

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(Discussion questions on page 7)

This fall we are considering seven statements Jesus makes about himself in the Gospel of John. These are times when Jesus begins a sentence, “I Am,” then adds a rich metaphor or image. I am the bread of life, light of the world, the door, good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way the truth and the life, the true vine.

These rich statements help us understand both *who* Jesus is, and *what* he does for us.

Last week we covered the first, where Jesus says, “I am the bread of life,” which emphasized Jesus’ offered to satisfy our soul’s deep longings.

This week we turn to light. If bread spoke to satisfaction, light speaks to illumination—guidance, knowledge, seeing what is real and true. For anyone feeling there is darkness around you or within you, Jesus’ words in John 8:12 could not be more relevant:

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life (Jn 8:12).

We consider these words and the scene they unfold in Jn 8:12-20 in three parts: **(1) The Light That Is Brightest; (2) The Light That Confronts; (3) The Light That Delivers from Darkness.**

I. The Light That Is Brightest

The first thing to note is the setting—where and when Jesus speaks. Clues come in verses 12 and 20.

“Again Jesus spoke,” which begins verse 12, tells us *when* this happened. It is a continuation of a conversation that began back in chapter 7, at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. *Where* things happened are explained in verse 20,

These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple... (8:20).

Here’s why this matters. Jesus is speaking on the last, climatic day of a week-long feast, the Feast of Tabernacles. On that final day there was a great light ceremony in the evening, which involved the lighting of huge lamps in one of the Temple’s courts which happened to be right next to “the treasury,” where Jesus is speaking. The lamps burned bright into the night, lighting up all of Jerusalem, and there were celebrations, dancing and people holding torches in their hands and singing; the Levitical orchestra made music as light glowed from the Temple.¹

¹ “The lighting of the four huge lamps in the temple’s court of women and the exuberant celebration that took place under their light; dancing through the night, holding burning torches in their hands and singing songs and praise; the Levitical orchestras cutting loose, with the light from the temple area shedding its glow all over Jerusalem – this is the context in which Jesus declares to the people *I am the light of the world*. (Carson, *John*, 337).

This commemorated scenes from the Old Testament where God appeared as light, especially when He lead Israel through the wilderness as a pillar of light:

The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light (Ex 13:21).

It is at this pregnant moment that Jesus draws all attention to himself with startling words: “I Am the light of the world” (Jn 8:12). He has a way of capturing the moment! He is saying, I am the True Light. I am the brightest light. Look to me as you would to God.

There are two things to notice at this point of the scene:

First, Jesus is claiming once again to be equal with God. Notice that Jesus is *not* saying, “I am a light in the world.” Or “I *point to* the light.” Or “I am a light for the Jews.” He is saying, “I am the light of the world.”

The Jews new exactly what he was saying. God alone is the light. They say in their Scriptures,

The LORD is my light and my salvation (PS 27:1).

They know that when the Messiah comes, it will be as light:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.” (Isa 9.2).

It is God “who dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6:16). When Jesus says “I am the light of the world,” he is saying that he and God are one. As he later says to his disciples, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9).

This is the *driving* point of John’s Gospel and axis upon which Christianity turns. Jesus of Nazareth is the maker of the universe, the eternal God, *incarnate*. And it is precisely because of statements like these that the Jews want to stone him by the end of chapter 8.²

That is the first thing His claim to be the light of the world tell us—Jesus is the brightest light. It also tells us something about ourselves.

Second, Jesus’ claim reminds us that we need light—His light: If the image of Jesus as bread spoke of the human need for nourishment and satisfaction, light speaks to our need for understanding, illumination, truth—for a true seeing of reality.

You turn on a light to see things—what’s in the room, how to walk a path. Spiritually, Jesus is the light by which we properly see the world, people, ourselves. As the Psalmist says, “In your light do we see light” (Ps 36:9).

And by coming into the world as light, Jesus is undermining any notion that humanity already has the light or can discover it ourselves.

² “So they picked up stones to throw at him,” (Jn 8:59).

This doesn't mean that science and philosophy shed no light on things. It means that without Jesus we cannot know see things in their fullness; and we cannot know many of the things we simply must know.

Is man responsible for the world and his fellows, or not? Are all men equal in dignity, or ranked by ability and class? Is something wrong with mankind, or are we perfect as we are? Are we mortal or immortal. Are we free when we follow our passions, or free when we resist them? Is there a god or not? If so, what is God like?

Modern man has discovered some things but still walks in deep darkness. Jesus says to people seeing in the greatest of man-made light, "I am the light of the World."

By what light are you seeing?³

That is the first point: Jesus is the Light that is brightest, because He is God shining forth in our midst. Second, we note how the light impacts those it appears to—the Light that challenges.

II. The Light That Confronts

After Jesus' declaration, the rest of the passage is reaction—or confrontation. It feels like a trial scene.

The religious leaders try to dismiss Jesus' statement over a technicality:

The Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true." (8:13).

In certain matters of Jewish law, brining evidence into court required having two or more witnesses.

Jesus responds by saying that he both transcends that law and fulfills it:

¹⁴ Jesus answered, "Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one (8:14-15).

Here he transcends it: "even if I am the only witness, my witness is true." Why is this? It's because Jesus is God, and God cannot lie. The law about two or more witnesses exists because humans lie. Jesus doesn't. And People judge by outward appearances ("you judge according to the flesh, v 15"); God judges the heart (that's what Jesus means when he says "I judge no one", v 15; he judges no one by mere outward appearance).

He goes on, however, to show that, nevertheless, there are two speaking when Jesus speaks: Jesus and His Father:

¹⁸ I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me." (Jn 8:16-18).

³ What light guides you? The light of reason? The light of an ideology? The light of power? The light of the algorithm driving what you see on social media? Or the Light of Jesus Christ?

Here is a window into the relationship of the first two members of the Trinity, the Father and Son. The Son only speaks what the Father says—thus, Jesus speaks the Words of God.

The point to draw out from this interaction is this: *the Light challenges*. Light come into darkness without confrontation. And there are two reasons for this:

First, light confronts because light *demands response*. By its very nature, it cannot be ignored because it is light. You cannot be totally indifferent towards it; you cannot, not see it.

E.g., if you want to wake up your teenager who is sleeping in on school day, you can tell them to get up a few times, but if that doesn't work you *open the blinds and let the light stream in*. The light demands a response. The teen can either *hide* under the covers or *wake up*. But the light *demands response*.

Once Jesus makes this claim, hearers must form an opinion. We can reject him. We can accept him. We can seek to know more. But we can no more ignore him than we can ignore the sun.

Second, light confronts because light *exposes*. Light can be welcome and unwelcome. It is welcome when you need it to see to drive, read, or walk. It is unwelcome when you don't want to be seen. Maybe it's early in the morning and you just got out of bed, and you are not looking your best. You don't want to be seen in the bright light by people.

On a spiritual level, as the Light of the World Jesus confronts because he *exposes the heart*.

When Simeon blessed the infant Jesus, he said "this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel ... so that thoughts form many hearts may be revealed" (Lk 2:33-35).

John puts it this way:

This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God. (Jn 3:19-21).

The Light of Christ is the light of Truth. It lays bare our will, our secret motives, our hearts.

Consider how truth exposes the heart. Imagine you hold strongly to a position about a controversial matter. You find yourself in an argument with a group of people about it. One person begins to marshal in evidence and points that undermine your viewpoint. As you start to see this, something happens in your heart—you get defensive. You don't want to look wrong. You start to feel how you don't like that person. So, without engaging the facts, you double-down with rhetoric and passion. Perhaps like these Pharisees, you try to dismiss on grounds of a technicality.

What got exposed was more than the facts; it was your ego. What you want. What you are living for—your reputation is more important than the truth in that moment.

Let us pause and consider what this means for us. If you are a non-believer, let me ask if you have seen the light of Jesus. And by this I don't only mean, have you believed. I mean, have you felt the *challenge* of his claims? Have you had any reaction to him? If you have no reaction, then you

have not seen the light. To see this light is to react to it. You may dismiss him; But you cannot ignore him.

And I would caution you not to make the mistake of some of these early hearers. They do not take the time to investigate. Knowing Jesus grew up in Galilee, they say

Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from **Bethlehem?**" (7:42); Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee" (Jn 7:52).

But with just a little investigating, they would discover that Jesus did come from the line of David and was born in *Bethlehem* (Matt 1:20; 2:1).

Before you dismiss Jesus as the Light, have you really considered His light? Have you studied his life? Have you tested his offer to follow him so you can know the Father? Or have you simply buried your head back under the covers to ignore him? Are you sure that you are not rejecting him, not for intellectual reasons, but heart reasons? You simply don't want to surrender control of your life to him?

These are two features of the Light: it is the brightest light, and it is the light that confronts because it demands response and exposes hearts. Let us turn to a final observation.

III. The Light That Delivers from Darkness

The key verse in our passage is more than a statement; it is an invitation to be delivered from darkness:

I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life (Jn 8:12).

Darkness is multilayered in John's Gospel—and in our world. Darkness is walking in sin, idolatry; darkness is the oppression of the Evil One; darkness is all that is at enmity with God. And to complicate matters, darkness often masquerades as light. "Satan," Paul writes, "disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14). Jesus warns, "If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matt 6:23).

We can be following an ideology, a tradition, a social group, a cultural mood, that seems right because others are following, too, and because it promises good and truth. But it can be darkness, disguised as light.

This past week has felt like a dark time in our country. The slaying of Charlie Kirk, a father, husband, and outspoken Christian has left Americans reeling. This on top of school shootings and a gruesome stabbing of a young Ukrainian woman.

What does it mean to hear Jesus' word that He is a Light of the World at a time like this? What does it mean to follow him so that we no longer walk in darkness but have the light of life?

While it includes a call for civility and non-violence, it means more than this. It means letting the Gospel and Word of God reveal what darkness really is:

The darkness does not start with social media or politics—but *sin*. When Cain killed Abel, there was no internet or political atmosphere guiding him—it was “sin crouching at the door, seeking to devour” (Gen 4:7).

The darkness is more than people you disagree with—it is a supernatural enemy at war against the light, Satan and his evil schemes.

The darkness is more than different views about policy—it is disagreement about the fundamental nature of reality.

And darkness impacts us all—it’s the hatred that can flow through all our hearts.

As a nation, we have now for decades nurtured darkness. We rejected God while calling many forms of sin, virtue. We have “sown to the wind and are reaping the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7): a whirlwind of a mental health epidemic, an unimaginable ignorance about the fundamental features of reality like what a man or woman is, what marriage is, of an embarrassing lack of upright character in our people.

Coherence and order cannot be maintained forever when there are deeply embedded untruths in a system—America felt this during the Civil War.

Thought I do not think it is helpful to be alarmist or afraid at this time, I do feel it is crucial to ask what it means to walk in the light, and to be light, in darkness. Let me suggest four ways as we close:

First, get right with Jesus in your own heart. Is he your light? Does he shine brighter in your life than all other lights?

Second, get right with your own fragility. You are not immortal. You will die. Are you ready to stand before your maker? Jesus says, “Unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins (John 8:24). Jesus can deliver from the darkness of sin and death.

Third, asks if you are reflecting the Light of Jesus with your life—your words, your actions in private and public. Jesus calls us to shine as light, to be like a city shining on a hill (Matt 5:14-16). In your posture towards others, are you adding to darkness or shining a light in it? If you want to get darkness out of a room, you don’t get a bucket and scoop out darkness; you turn on the light. Before you point out darkness around you, ask if you are shining as His Light.

Fourth, be courageously and humbly willing to offend: When you are the light, it will offend people. If your Christianity only ever makes the world like you, then you are hiding your light under a bushel. Just hear Jesus on this:

If the world hates you, know that it has **hated** me before it **hated** you (Jn 15:18).

In the world you will have **tribulation**. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (Jn 16:33).

[Father] I have given them your word, and the world has **hated** them. (Jn 17:14).

This is not about being a pugilist or hate. John says in his first Letter: “Whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness (1 Jn 2:11). It’s about being faithful and letting God work things out according to His sovereign purpose.

I close with a vision of where things are headed—and an urgent plea.

Christians are people of supreme hope, because we know of the resurrection, and final victor of the Light. We know that even when it is dark, it is not the darkness of the sun setting, but the darkness of early morning, for the Sun is Rising, evermore, until one day it will be as John tells us in his last book, Revelation:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their **light**, and they will reign forever and ever. (Rev 22:1-5).

Friend, will you come to the One Who is the Light. Will you put your trust in Him and Follow Him? He will lead you out of all darkness.

Let’s pray.

Small Group Questions for John 8:12

1. In John 8:12, Jesus says “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life.” Consider three of the words here, “light,” “world,” and “darkness.” Take a moment and try to define them. What do they mean to Jesus? To you?
2. What difference does it make that Jesus says, “I am *the* light” versus “I am *a* light”? Can Jesus make this claim without implying that he is God?
3. What light do you think you walk by? What, or whose, light shines the brightest in your life? What are some dominating lights in our culture? Where are they leading people?
4. In what ways might the Light of Christ confront you today? What might it expose about your life or heart that needs to change? Think about sharing this with a trusted Christian friend this week who can pray for you.
5. How can you reflect the light of Christ in your own life? What might it look like not merely to decry darkness in the world, but also to shine as beautiful light in its midst? How can Christians shine Jesus’ light in public life in a way that is both faithful and humble—even when it risks offending others? What would some concrete practices look like?