

## John on Jesus - Light of the World

Sign Title: Light of the World

October 28, 2012

Have you ever felt alone in this world? Have you ever laid in bed and wondered about the purpose of life? We are born. We live. We die. Why? What are we here for? Have you ever felt purposeless?

If you haven't felt purposeless, I know you have felt powerless, in particular, with issues of sin. Maybe it is your words. You promise yourself that you won't burst out in anger but you can't control it. You yell and scream at the ones you love when you least expect it. Maybe the issue is lust. You promise yourself that you will resist the temptation, but like a drug addict craving a fix, you go walk back to the sins you hate. You are powerless. Sin has its grip on you, and you don't know how to break free.

If you have ever felt that purposeless in this world or experienced bondage to sin in your life, you came to the right place. We are looking at God's answers to those struggles this morning.

For those of you who are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are working our way through the Gospel of John. Today, we are in the eighth chapter at verse 12.

Take out your Bibles and turn to John 8:12. If you didn't bring a Bible, John 8:12 is on page 894 of the pew Bible. Take out your notes. Let's stand as I read the text.

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." So the Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true." 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. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.” They said to him therefore, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come. John 8:12–20 (ESV)

If this passage sounds confusing. Don’t be alarmed. It is confusing. Not many people teach on the eighth chapter of John just for that reason. That is a shame. This chapter teaches us some completely revolutionary truths about Jesus. This morning, what we are about to discover is something very few of you know, even if you spent your life in church. We will learn something so startling that, for most of you, it will completely revolutionize your understanding of the Old Testament. For others of you, it may even revolutionize your entire picture of the Bible. This is a tough text but it has a rich payout. Let’s dive in.

How many of you watched the presidential debates? In this passage, Jesus made a claim, and an intense debate between Jesus and the religious leaders followed. If you watched the presidential debates, you know debates are hard to follow. In the same way, John 8:12-29 is hard to follow. It is like you are reading a tennis match as it bounces back and forth.

In the interest of time, I am resisting the temptation to cover the details of the debate. Instead, we will focus simply on verse 12, Jesus’ claim that sparked the debate. Just as Jesus claim shook the tectonic plates of religious world in the first century, when we understand what Jesus said in verse 12, it will shake the foundations of our world as well.

## **Jesus' claim --- I am the light of the world.**

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12 (ESV)

Who heard this verse before this morning? Raise your hand. I grew up hearing it. It doesn't sound threatening. It doesn't sound revolutionary. But apparently there is something earth-shaking about it. Look how the religious leaders reacted when they heard these words.

These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come. John 8:20 (ESV)

John was surprised that nobody threw Jesus in jail for saying this. According to John, the only reason Jesus escaped from the grasp of the Jewish leaders was the supernatural protection of God. Apparently, saying, "I am the light of the world" was something that could get you in serious trouble. What is it about this statement that set people's hair on fire?

To understand, we need a little background. Let's begin with the biblical background of light and darkness and funnel our way back to this verse.

## **The Bible uses light and darkness as a metaphor to describe the world.**

We need to begin by understanding how the Bible talks about light and darkness. In the Bible, light and darkness is not just a physical experience every 24 hours. There are rich metaphorical connections.

Remember a time when the power went off in your home and there was absolutely no light.

### **What is the problem with darkness?**

**No sense of orientation.** It doesn't take long to lose a sense of orientation. In a dark room, it is hard to tell east from west, north from south.

**No way to avoid danger and enjoy beauty.** Not only do we lose orientation, but we can't see what is around us. How many of us have skinned our shins in the dark because we ran into something we couldn't see? Not only that, without light, we cannot see beauty. We cannot enjoy a rose. We cannot see a smiling face.

**The world grows cold and dies.** The earth is in the process of tilting away from the sun. This winter, we will have less light. Crops will not grow. Iowa will grow cold. Things die without light. We are not made to flourish in the darkness. Our planet and our lives are made to flourish in the light. That is why so many people fly south for the winter.

Everything I just described about physical light and darkness, the Bible parallels with spiritual light and darkness. A life apart from God is lived in darkness. A life connected with God is lived in the light.

In physical darkness, we cannot tell the difference between east and west. A life in spiritual darkness can't tell the difference between right and wrong.

A life in physical darkness can't see dangers and enjoy beauty. A life in spiritual darkness doesn't have the Word of God to tell show what is sin and the Holy Spirit to lead and guide. A life in contact with God has the light of God through the Bible and the Holy Spirit dwelling within.

A life in physical darkness grows cold, shrivels and eventually dies. A life in spiritual darkness is bitter, wounded, dominated by sinful desires and eventually dies eternally. A life that is brought into the light of God is a new creation. Like the planet coming alive, our hearts come alive to God when we have a relationship with him. There is joy that cannot be known apart from the light of God.

In the Bible there is this overarching metaphor of darkness and light describing a life with and without God. There are literally hundreds of verses which use this metaphor.

Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; Psalm 43:3 (ESV)

Apart from God bringing light and truth, we are lost.

The unfolding of your words gives light; Psalm 119:130 (ESV)

We are groping around in darkness until somebody helps us understand God's Word. God's Word is how God turns on the light in our lives.

...the Lord my God lightens my darkness. Psalm 18:28 (ESV)

**Light and darkness is a strong theme in the Gospel of John.**

This metaphor of light and darkness is not just used sprinkled throughout the Bible but it is a major theme in the Gospel of John. The reason God inspired John to develop this theme so extensively is because it was such a dominant theme in the Hebrew culture. In addition, the light and darkness theme was a big part of the Greek culture of the first century. We don't naturally connect with light and darkness terminology, but the Hebrews and Greeks did.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. John 1:4 (ESV)

...The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. John 1:8–9 (ESV)

The background we need to begin with is that the world and everyone in it lives in utter darkness. Jesus is the only source of light and life and he is coming into the world. Jesus is the one you are searching for.

### **The background of John 8.**

When we left off our story, Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast is a week-long celebration held at the end of harvest. It was a time when the Jews remembered what it was like not to have a home and not to have a harvest. They remembered what it was like when they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.

One of the ways they celebrated this holiday is they lived in little tents made of tree branches woven together. Sometimes they called them booths. It reminded them what it was like not to have a home.

They also observed particular ceremonies to help them remember those 40 years. One ceremony we studied three weeks ago was the water pouring ceremony. Every morning the priest took a pitcher of water from the Pool of Siloam and poured the water on the altar with a crowd cheering around him. It was a reminder of when the Israelites were dying of thirst in the wilderness. God brought water out of the rock. Three weeks ago, we learned that Paul said that rock was Christ. Christ provided ancient Israel water in the wilderness. This morning Jesus makes another claim.

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12 (ESV)

In verse 20, it says he spoke these words in the treasury. The treasury was in the Court of the Women in the temple.

There was another ceremony during the Feast of Booths that, because we aren't Jewish, we are not aware of. The water pouring ceremony took place in the morning; this second ceremony took place at night. In the treasury area of the temple, where Jesus said these words, there was an enormous candelabra. The young priests used ladders to pour barrels of oil into these enormous lamps. When the sun went down, they lit the lamps and a column of



fire rose into the sky. The Mishnah, which are writings by the rabbis in the day of Jesus, tells us the flames from these enormous candles were so tall and bright that there wasn't a home in the city that wasn't illuminated by their light. At night, under these flames, the temple orchestra struck up a tune. The people would dance under the light of these candles that illuminated the city. This candelabra, with the huge flame that licked the night sky, reminded the people of the pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the wilderness for 40 years as they wandered the wilderness. For 40 years God's glory dwelled among them as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. After they came to the Promised Land, God's glory departed. The last time God's glory was seen among his people was hundreds of years before.

When Jesus said, "I am the light of the world," it was on the morning of the eighth day of the feast. This was the morning when the enormous oil-filled lamps

were snuffed out until the next year. Everyone was packing up the decorations. It was a time of sadness because not only was God's glory departed for hundreds of years but the representative of that glory would not be seen for another year.

Jesus stood under these enormous lamps and said, "I am the light... of the world."

"Guess what," Jesus said. God's glory is back, and it was standing right in front of them under the lamps. Jesus said, "It is me!" This time, Jesus wasn't just saving Israel, he was there to save the world.

I want you to hold on to your seats at this point. Jesus didn't just claim to be the glory of God in the present, he claimed to be the one who saved ancient Israel out of slavery in Egypt in the past. God was taking out the Exodus tape, and he was playing it again, except this time the Exodus tape was played at full power. Jesus did not just save God's chosen people out of physical slavery and physical death in the land of Egypt. He saved God's people from slavery to sin and eternal death in the lake of fire. Jesus did not just save God's chosen people of one nation, he saved his chosen people from all nations of the world. Jesus did not just lead people to a Promised Land in Palestine, he led God's chosen people to the New Heaven and the New Earth. Jesus led ancient Israel for 40 years in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. Jesus is leading us to our Promised Land in the New Creation today.

What I find amazing is Jesus is the one who led Old Testament Israel out of Egypt. Let's put our finger in the text and see if that is true.



Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night. Exodus 14:19–20 (ESV)

Notice two components. First is the angel of God. This is subtle, but four years ago we studied this. In the Old Testament, when it says, “the angel of the Lord” not “an angel of the Lord,” that is Jesus appearing on earth before he took on a physical body in Bethlehem. Jesus was clearly connected with the cloud and the pillar fire in the Old Testament.

It was Jesus who protected God’s people from the Egyptians when they pursued Israel in the wilderness. It was Jesus who led Israel for 40 years in the wilderness to the Promised Land. It was Jesus who provided the water from the rock. It was Jesus who provided manna in the desert just like he provided the bread for the feeding of the 5,000. The Exodus of God’s people from Egypt and bringing them to the Promised Land was done by Jesus. I know most of us just think of Jesus saving people in the New Testament but he saved the people of God from death and slavery in Egypt in the Old Testament too.

Let me give you more evidence. Look at Luke 9 in the transfiguration.

And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure (exodus), which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Luke 9:29–31 (ESV)

In English, it says *departure*, but if you check the Greek, there is something interesting. It is the word *exodus*. The men were talking with Jesus about the exodus he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. In other words, there is a tight parallel between the exodus of Israel from Egypt in the Old

Testament and the death of Christ in Jerusalem. Jesus' death on the cross is our exodus from the power of sin and death.

The Bible is not two books. It is not an Old Testament without Jesus and a New Testament with Jesus. It is one book with Jesus saving God's people in both parts. This is earth-shaking for many of you. I prayed about this before preaching it and God brought Jude 5 to mind. That is, for me, the final nail in this argument.

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. Jude 5 (ESV)

The Bible tells us that the whole Old Testament Exodus motif was New Testament salvation in miniature.

There is another great verse in Isaiah prophesying about Jesus speaking exactly what he spoke in John 8:12.

He 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 49:6 (ESV)

Isaiah, writing about God's Messiah, told us it wouldn't be glorifying enough to have him just save Israel. This time, his salvation will reach to the ends of the earth. Do you see why John was surprised nobody arrested him?

### **The command of Jesus --- follow me**

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12 (ESV)

Jesus commands us to follow him because he is the light of the world. In the Gospel of John, it is clear that following Jesus is not a once-in-a-lifetime decision, it is a daily decision.

**Following Jesus is not a once-in-a-lifetime decision, it is a daily decision.**

Ancient Israel was not just called to simply believe the pillar of fire existed. The Israelites were called to follow it every day. The pillar of fire led them to the Promised Land. To get there, they needed to follow it. Every time the pillar of fire moved, they had a decision to make. Would they follow? It is the same for us. Jesus is not just something we believe; he is someone we follow. He is leading us. Every day, we choose to follow him and honor him or we choose to chart our own course in this world. When we chart our own course, it is always into darkness, sin and death. If we follow him, he promises two things will happen.

### **Jesus' promises**

**You will not walk in darkness.**

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12 (ESV)

Earlier, we talked about darkness. Walking in darkness is similar to bumping around a dark room. Life is purposeless. There is not hope in the face of tragedy. There is no comfort. Following Jesus frees us from a life of darkness.

We also talked about the power of sin. Following Jesus frees us from the power of sin. When Christians talk to me about struggles with sin, the issue is not the struggle with sin. Most of the time, when you get to the root of the issue, it

is a struggle for them to follow Jesus. They believe in Jesus as a principle; they don't want to follow him as a person. As Christians, they drift further and further from the light until they find themselves ensnared by sin. Less Jesus equals more sin. More Jesus equals less sin. Following him is what frees us from darkness.

### **You will have the light of life.**

The word *have* is a special word. It means *to possess*. When we follow Jesus, God's light is literally something we possess, and it radiates from us.

Jesus drew on another Old Testament parallel. Remember when Moses spent time with God on Mt. Sinai? When he came down from spending time with God, his face glowed. He possessed the glory of God, and when he walked among the people he shone like a light bulb.

The Bible tells us that, just like Moses radiated God's glory because he spent time with God, as we follow Jesus, we don't just find freedom from the power of sin and death. Like Moses, we begin to radiate God's glory to people. People notice we are different. We shine because we are changed. Paul picked up this theme and talked about it in Philippians.

...that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, Philippians 2:15 (ESV)

### **Conclusion**

1. Jesus saved God's people out of slavery and death in the land of Egypt. On the cross he saved us from slavery to sin and eternal death in the Lake of Fire.

2. The only way to experience the freedom Jesus secured is to follow him to the Promised Land. That is what Israel had to do in the Old Testament; it is what we must do today.
3. Following Jesus is not a one-time decision, it is a daily decision. The light is moving.
4. The closer we walk to the light, the greater our freedom from sin and the brighter we shine in the world.

### Conclusion --- unbelievers

This morning, for some of you, this is all new. You are not sure what it means to follow Christ. If that is you, I want to give you a very simple step to begin.

**Just look.** Just look to Jesus. It all begins when we throw our hands in the air and tell Jesus we can't do it. We are purposeless and powerless. Unless Jesus saves us, we have no hope. Just look to him. In that moment, you will find that you begin to change.

### Prayer

Jesus, thank you for being the light of the world. Just like you saved Israel from slavery to sin and death to bring them to the Promised Land in the Old Testament, you did it again and in a much greater way on the cross. Thank you for doing that, because if you hadn't, none of us would know you or praise you. This morning, I pray for those who don't know you but whom you are calling to take a first step. I ask you to give them the courage to just look. Amen.



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