

I Am the Light of the World

John 8:12 & 9:5

INTRODUCTION:

There is perhaps no greater symbol common to all mankind than light and darkness. People of every age, race, and language throughout history seem to agree upon the meaning of these symbols. Light stands for what is good. Darkness stands for what is evil. Behind these familiar images of light and darkness is the classic battle between good and evil.

In the old westerns, the good guys wore white and the bad guys wore black. I am a fan of science fiction, and I have noticed how often in our imaginations of alien life with superior intelligence and supernatural abilities we envision creatures of light. The *Star Trek* universe was frequented by such beings. The Aliens offering immortality to the senior citizens in *Cocoon* were creatures of light. Stephen Spielberg's aliens at the end of *AI* glowed with an inner light. The curious and kind undersea beings in *The Abyss* were angelic in appearance and enshrouded in light. And, of course, the planet Pandora in James Cameron's *Avatar* was a world filled with bioluminescent wonder.

Ancient religions from around the world recognize the sun as a good and life-giving deity. We avoid dark streets and alleys. We don't walk in the shadows for fear of what may be lurking there. We park under street lamps and put security lights on our houses. Criminals do their work at night, in the dark, under the cover of shadows so they can't be seen. Children, by nature, seem to be afraid of the dark and seek the solace of a night light or a cracked door, for in the darkness hides monsters, ghosts, boogymen, and other fears that haunt young minds.

Good and evil, light and darkness: to all of mankind this is a fearful symmetry that exists in our world. Why is this? Have we all learned this independently from our diverse cultures, or is there something intrinsic in our nature that recognizes this reality?

God's Word tells us that the battle between light and darkness is indeed a reality. The battle between light and darkness is waged within the hearts of men and women. We are the cosmic battlefield. However, the battle is not between two equal forces struggling for supremacy. Though darkness often seems to pervade, light is the supreme power. Think about it: all the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of the smallest flaming candle. It will light up just the same no matter how much darkness surrounds it.

The war between light and darkness reached its decisive battle 2,000 years ago, and the light was shown to be supreme. At the beginning of his gospel, the apostle John says of Jesus' arrival into our world of darkness, *"In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it."* Though the tide was turned and victory guaranteed two millennia ago, the fight still wages. There are yet battles to be won as darkness still enshrouds many hearts, and holds many more as prisoners of its lies, doubt, and deception.

Darkness permeates our lives today in many ways. It darkens our futures with mistakes from our past. It confuses our choices and decisions by casting glooms of doubt. It buries our hopes in black graves of unbelief.

Jesus enters our night and confronts our shadows saying, *"I am the light of the World."* Not only that, but he told us that we could have this light, see in it, walk in it, and bask in its warmth. He told us that this light gives us spiritual life. Just like the light of the sun gives physical life to this planet. Without the rays of the sun no plant or animal could live. The sun creates the atmosphere and environment in which life is possible, and it also gives the energy that allows new life to grow. In the same way, our souls require the spiritual light from God's Son to live, grow, and flourish.

Jesus also tells us that his light will dispel the darkness from our lives. The darkness that leaves its shadows in every corner of our mind, haunting every thought; the darkness that fills our hearts with depression, snares it with frustration, taunts it with anger, burdens it with bitterness and lies; the darkness that dims our hope; and the darkness that obscures our ability to choose wisely can all be driven out by Jesus Christ.

Let's open our Bibles to witness this occasion when this shaft of light cut through the darkness, creating a new dawn of hope for all of humanity. Turn in your Bibles first to John 8:12. *"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.'"* In the very next chapter, Jesus says in John 9:5, *"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."*

These two statements really are not separate; they are a part of the same story. The whole story begins all the way back at John 7:14 and goes all the way to 10:21. To fully

understand what Jesus is saying, we need to understand what is happening in this context.

What we have in these few chapters is basically a series of confrontations between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Jesus' popularity had peaked with the feeding of the 5,000, but he refused to give into their desires. Several months have passed, and Jesus' popularity is quickly declining. The time for the crucifixion is almost here, and John uses this series of confrontations to show us how and why the Jews rejected Jesus. However, our Lord uses these encounters to finish his earthly ministry, and to teach his disciples some valuable lessons. After all, they would continue his ministry after he was gone.

These confrontations are not silly little squabbles. Jesus and the Pharisees weren't sending Twitter insults back and forth and posting offensive memes on their Facebook pages. These were heavyweight theological debates. This was the stuff of seminary doctoral theses. Today, we call this apologetics, a sound defense of the gospel, except in this case, Jesus is giving a sound defense of himself, his ministry, his identity and his mission.

As I read through these four chapters in John, what really sticks out to me is the spiritual darkness of the people. The Jews thought they lived in a time of darkness, because of the Roman Empire. There was darkness because of the politics and the economics of their daily lives. If someone could just overthrow Rome it would be the dawning of a new day. They believed the Messiah would come and be this light, but he would be a political light, a militant light, an economic light, not a light in their hearts and minds. Jesus, however, exposes the real darkness. It was in their own hearts. Jesus wasn't the kind of messiah or light they wanted.

There's also something that's not immediately obvious in our text that, if you'll forgive the pun, sheds some light on Jesus' statement. This all occurs in Jerusalem over a period of about three days during the feast of Tabernacles. We talked about the feast of tabernacles (or tents/booths) a couple of weeks ago. It was the last of the O.T. Covenant feasts. It was to commemorate their wandering in the wilderness when they lived in temporary tents. It also marked an end to their year, and celebrated the completion of the harvest, signifying their work for the year was nearly complete.

So, in a way, Jesus was saying that his work, too, was nearly done, and that his harvest

was complete. He had brought in those who were going to come, and it was time to finish his work.

There is also an important historical factor connected to the Feast of Tabernacles that the text does not mention. However, every Jew knew and understood this. It was an event called the illumination of the temple. Most of these confrontations took place in the temple courts. During the feast, large grandstands were set up in the temple court for the people to watch. Four gigantic menorah or candelabra rising 7 ½ stories into the air were erected around the court. After dark they would be lit. Ancient Jewish historians record that their brilliance could be seen throughout the entire city. This, in turn, would be followed by singing, dancing, and praise— all to commemorate God's' leading his people through the darkness of the wilderness with a pillar of fire.

Now picture all of this in your mind. Out in front of the great temple of God are huge grandstands packed with expectant Jews. The four gigantic candelabra are ablaze with a glow that can be seen for miles. The people are thinking about the pillar of fire that guided their ancestors through a dark, unknown wilderness. Then Jesus steps into a clearing, looking intently at all those gathered, and says, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* Think of what an audacious claim that really was.

But what was he really saying? What does it mean to us? Let's look a little closer and see. As I've already mentioned light and darkness are common scriptural themes. Biblically, light communicates two main ideas: Truth and Purity. This encompass things like understanding, intelligence, knowledge and morality, holiness, and righteousness. Naturally, darkness represents the opposite of these things. But what does it mean to walk in darkness. “Walking”, when used as a metaphor in scripture refers to habitual behavior, or life-style.

“Walking in Darkness” in John refers to sinful behavior, We all know what it is to have a sinful habit. Something we can't seem to shake. We try to hide it, deny it, play it down, but it seems to haunt us and threaten us. We keep doing it again and again. Such sinful habits also have a tendency to grow. You may be suffering from such a dark habit in your life right now, and you know it is trying to snuff out spiritual light. “Walking in Darkness” though does

not just refer to the sinful behavior. It also refers to the consequences of that behavior. We all know what that's like too. The anxiety, the guilt, frustration, depression, and hopelessness that can hang over us like dark clouds because of the dark habits in our lives. That is why in the Bible "darkness" often refers to a state of unhappiness.

But Jesus says he is the light that can keep us from walking in darkness. The word Jesus used for light is "Phos". Our word phosphorescence is based on this word. In the original Greek it had several meanings, all of which apply to Jesus.

1. It is the light of the sun, A light that is always there. It didn't have to be lit. It doesn't fade or go out.
2. It is a light that enables us to see.
3. It is a kind of light that is not kindled.

The Greek language has another word for light, "luchnos" which was used for an oil lamp or a torch. It is the kind of light that must be lit and maintained. It needed fuel to burn. If you don't add oil, it will go out. If you're not careful or don't pay attention, it could blow out. It doesn't burn by itself.

So Jesus is the kind of light that shines on his own. We don't light him. His light doesn't go out. He's always been shining and will always shine.

After Jesus makes his startling claim to be the light of the world in John 9, He illustrates that truth by healing a man born blind. He had known only darkness. He lives his entire life in darkness. But he had eyes where they counted, in his heart. He could see the light of truth; whereas, the hearts of the religious leaders were cloaked in darkness.

Although Jesus gave this man physical sight, He gave him something much greater as well— spiritual sight, for Jesus meant this as a spiritual lesson for all. Listen to verses 35-39.

³⁵ *Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"* ³⁶ *He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"* ³⁷ *Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you."* ³⁸ *He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.* ³⁹ *Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."*

Although the statement, "I am the light of the world" reads the same in this verse and in 8:12 in our English Bibles, in the Greek it is actually different. 8:12 says, "I am the light of the world", but this verse is worded a bit differently and could be translated, "I am light to the

world.” Jesus is both the light of the world and a light to the world. Do you understand the difference? One light shows us where we need to go, the other shows us where we are.

Imagine that you are in a clearing in a deep forest in the middle of night. Extending from the clearing are several paths. You know that only one path leads to escape, and the others all lead to ruin. In the dark, however, you can't tell. What you need is light, but not just one kind of light, but two. You first need a beacon to show you which way to go, then you need a light with you to show you where you are. This will keep you from stumbling on roots, getting your foot stuck in a hole, or expose any other dangers that may be lurking on the path.

Haven't you ever followed a house of cabin light as a mark of destination, and at the same time carried a flashlight to illuminate your immediate vicinity? Jesus provides us both kinds of light. Jesus shows us not only where we need to go, but where we're at. We should not just think of this as illuminating all that is around us, but all that is within us. The biggest dangers in our spiritual journey are not the temptations from without, but the temptations from within. Paul tells us in Ephesians that we were all once darkness, but that the light of Christ has exposed everything.

Here are some ways the light of Jesus will help you see where you are and where you are going:

1. Enabling you to set Godly priorities out of your life's cluttered agenda
2. Clarifying your vision to see how circumstances and events fit into those priorities.
3. Giving you the wisdom to make decisions that are in accordance with your Godly priorities.
4. Strengthening your confidence to move forward in life knowing you're within God's will for your life.

We all want this light, but how do we get it. Jesus says by following Him. What does it really mean to follow Jesus? A lot of people say different things: to believe who Jesus is, to pray a prayer, to be baptized, to go to church, to be good. Well, the word Jesus used here translated as “follow” has several shades of meaning in the Greek which will help us to understand what it means to follow:

1. **Submission**- A soldier following his captain out of faithfulness.
2. **Obedience**- A slave who accompanies his master and does his bidding.
3. **Discipleship**- A student who follows the teaching of a wise

teacher.

4. **Allegiance**- A citizen observing the laws of the land out of a sense of patriotism.
5. **Understanding**- Following and comprehending a teachers line of thought or reasoning.

If you look at all the areas of life that these things include you can see that to follow means to bring you mind, body and soul under the headship of Christ. It is to pursue Jesus with all that you have and all that you are. It's when we truly follow Jesus with our lives, and not just give him our token hour on Sunday.

William Barclay wrote, *"Just as a flower can never blossom when it never sees the sunlight, our lives can never flower with the grace and beauty they ought to have until they are illuminated with the light of the presence of Jesus."*

Conclusion

We all need the light of Jesus Christ, The eternal light of truth and purity. We need the light to show us where to go and to show us where we are, Many Christians, though they have seen the light of where to go, let their lives become darkened by sinful habits so that they do not know where they are.

We must be careful not to be like the Jewish religious leaders, to have the light of life shine in our presence, but to not let it illuminate anything in our lives. The blind man in Jn. 9 was physically blind, but he could see what mattered. Although we can see physically, our spiritual eyes may need a check-up. Pastor and author Lloyd John Ogilve wisely points out, "We can have 20/20 vision with our physical eyes and suffer from spiritual glaucoma in the eyes of our hearts." Hellen Keller, who understood a thing or two about blindness and living in darkness said, "Better to be blind and see with your heart than to have two good eyes and see nothing."

For centuries this world was ruled by darkness, but now God has made light available to all. He threw a switch on a hill 2000 years ago that ripped the darkness in half and let the glorious light of heaven show through.