

The Word Became Flesh | I Am The Light

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: John 8:12-30

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When I came to Fairview in 2004, one of my passions that I had as the director of teen ministries was taking teens on short term mission trips. I had realized in my own life that God had used those to shape me and to form me and he used those times to really draw me closer to him. And I found that he usually does more work in those who are going to serve than in those we are serving.

So in 2005, I took my first group of teenagers to crossville, Tennessee, through an organization called youth works, where we would camp and we would serve the under resourced there and crossville, Tennessee. We had two groups, the first group was a group of guys, and we went and we ended up repairing a deck for an older gentleman off the back of his house that had rotted so bad. He couldn't leave his house anymore.

And so we went there and worked on the deck while the group of ladies that were with us went to a trailer where somebody was living and they ended up repainting the whole outside of that trailer and fixing up the outside and making it look very, very nice. It was a rewarding trip. And as kind of a thank you, the group always on the last day on Friday allows you to do something fun as a group, something exciting.

And so that this particular trip, the organization had planned for us to go spelunking. This was the last day before we drove home. For those of you that don't know what spelunking is, it's caving. I don't know why they call it spelunking. That's kind of a funny word, but it's to go caving, walking in caves. Most of us had never gone spelunking before. And I know that we were excited to do so because that week had been a long week. It had been very hot. And we were working outside and sleeping in tents at night.

And so we were all very warm. And when you go into the caves that are inside of the earth, the average temperature is around the 50s. And so it stays there, no matter how hot or cold it is outside. And so we were looking forward if nothing else just to some lower temperatures. We had a great time walking and crawling and climbing through the caves. And as we were doing that, we got to a particular section of this cave called the birth canal.

Now, in this section of the cave, as you can imagine, the birth canal was a very tight spot that you had to squeeze through in order to get to the other side. And you had to actually, they had to determine if you were a certain weight, you actually couldn't go through the birth canal. There was another larger way to get around to get to where we were going. And so some of us lined up and we said, okay, we'll give it a try. And so I was able to go through the birth canal at that time. I'm not sure I would be able to today, all right?

I might have had to take the round route, but we went through the birth canal and got to this room, but the scary part really wasn't the birth canal. It was, you had to kind of get on this ledge and walk to where the birth canal was, and The Rock was right in your face. And on The Rock, where cave spiders. I know. I didn't want to put the picture up here, okay? If you're scared of spiders, don't look at the screen. And our guides kept telling us, don't worry, they're blind. They can't see. But as you can imagine, I didn't feel any better about that.

And so these were literally inches from your face as you're kind of, you know, shimmying along to get to the birth canal. Those of us that went through, we went through the birth canal. Some people went the other way. And we got to this small section of the cave. And I wish that I had taken a picture, but this was before the time of like fancy cell phones. It was before the iPhone and stuff. And so we didn't have a camera with us, but I remember sitting in this small room, and our guides had us all sit in a circle and we all had, you know, the helmets on with the lights and everything else as we're traveling through the caves.

And they said, okay, I want you to sit down. We're going to go in a circle, and I want you to turn off your lights. This was the first time in my life that I had experienced pitch darkness. Absolutely no light pollution whatsoever, meaning that when you turned off the lights, my eyes were wide open and I was waving my hand in front of my face, and you couldn't even see shadows or nothing. I mean, right now, if you close your eyes, it gets dark, but there's still some light going through your eyelids. So that if you wave your hand, you kind of have shadows or shade or things like that.

I know some of you are doing that now. I love it. But if you are in pitch darkness with your eyes wide open, waving your hand in front of your face, you can not even see the shadows. And so we turned off our lights. It was completely dark. And then as it was completely dark, we lit a candle, and we opened up our bibles, and I read the verse that I'm going to read to you today. John chapter 8 12.

So if you have your bibles, I encourage you to open up with me, put yourself in the pitch darkness with us and John chapter 8 12, and imagine reading this scripture. So let me pray and then I will read that this morning. Heavenly Father. We come before you today, and we thank you for your goodness. We gather to give you the praise that you deserve. We are so grateful for your mercy and your grace and your forgiveness and your love in our lives.

Thank you for all of those that have gathered here. And I pray that we would take that next step towards you that you would speak to us, draw us close, and may we respond and be obedient, we ask this in the name of Jesus, amen. John, chapter 8 12, John tells us that when 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.

Jesus said, I am the light of the world. Now, there's a few things in this verse that are easy to miss. And so that's why I stop here, write in verse 12, that I would like to point out in the first thing that I want to point out is the fact that Jesus uses this I am statement. It's important. It means something when John records that, that Jesus said, I am.

And if you and I aren't familiar with the Old Testament and how God rescued the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, we're not going to understand the full magnitude of Jesus there in the temple saying, I am the light of this world. We're also at a disadvantage because we are reading this in the English and not in the original Hebrew and Greek, and because of that, we missed some of the nuance that is there.

And what I am about to share with you would not have been missed by the original hearers who were speaking in Greek and Hebrew and understood that. So let me share a little more why this is so important that Jesus uses these I am statements. Some of you, maybe this is the first time we've been going through the book of John for a while, kind of jumping in and out. But as you go through the Gospel of John, you will recognize multiple I am statements that Jesus makes. And these are very important.

If you go back to the book of Exodus, in Exodus chapter three, God is calling a man named Moses, that he wants to send to the Israelite people back to the Israelite people so that he can rescue them from bondage. Lead them out of captivity from the Egyptian people. As God is calling Moses, Moses begins

making a lot of excuses to God as to why he is not the right person that is supposed to go and do that. There must be somebody better because he can't speak well and all of these other excuses.

And Moses thinks that he's come up with the best excuse. He says, God, okay, okay, just wait a second. So you want me to go back to my Israelite people and you want me to lead them from the Egyptians out of their bondage out of their captivity. And I don't even know your name. What am I supposed to say when I talk to them? And they say, well, who sent you? I don't even know what to call you. And so then God responds by saying, tell them that eh.

Sent you. Now you don't speak Hebrew, and so you're like, that's great. It just sounds a little, but what does that mean? It means I am who I am. So God says, when you go and they ask who sent you, I want you to respond. I am who I am. Now, the Israelites later would take that name of God and they would shorten it to one you probably are familiar with. Yahweh. The great I am.

This is the name for their God, that name actually became so holy and used just for God that they wouldn't even use the phrase Yahweh in their Hebrew language to refer to God because it was so holy. They took those same Hebrew letters and instead they would call him Jehovah, nobody was allowed to speak Yahweh because that was the name of God. And can you guess what phrase Jesus used in John chapter 8?

And in the whole gospel, when he would say, I am the light of the world. I am the way the truth and the life. In a not so subtle way, Jesus is saying, I am the great I am. Jesus was making a claim that he was God. So as a quick side note here, I love to use the Gospel of John when I run into other people of different faiths and different belief systems.

And they often want to claim, you know what? I believe Jesus existed. I believe that he was a good teacher. I believe that he was a good man, but I don't believe that he was God. And I often will look at John and take them through just a couple of these verses and say, Jesus claimed to be God. Here he says, I am. I am the great I am. And so if he wasn't God, then he's either crazy or a liar. Just a good teacher isn't an option for us to believe about Jesus.

If you remember, the Gospel of John is answering the question who is Jesus? And that's the most important question that any one of us will answer in our entire lives and we can see here that Jesus is making the claim to be I am. Now let me give you a little more context into where the story is taking place, the setting of the story. Remember that we're at the temple of Jerusalem, and we are at the feast of tabernacles.

And while we are at this feast, remember that this was a time that the Israelites would go back to Jerusalem. They're in the temple. They were celebrating and remembering God's provision as he would lead them out of Egypt. They were remembering his provision as it was time of the harvest season, and so they were gathering their crops, and we were saying, thank you, God. You are the great provider. So during this feast, there was a special evening, a ceremony that was called the illumination of the temple.

On this evening, as part of their ceremony and their time to remember, they would like four candles in the temple. Now, these weren't just a normal candles that you and I have in our House, these candles were 75 feet high. And they were large candles. Large enough that they would light up the entire temple area. These candles that they lit didn't just give them light so that they could have the ceremony.

There was a symbolism behind these candles that they lit. When they would light these candles, they were symbolizing the pillar of fire that God provided the Israelites to guide them on their journey in the wilderness. You see, when the Israelites were in the wilderness and they were traveling towards the promised land, for those of you that are familiar with the book of exodus, God says that he came down in a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day.

And so they would follow this presence of God. And if that cloud or fire stayed, they would stay. And sometimes they would camp for just one night and other times they would stay there for months. But until that cloud or fire left, they stayed where they were because God was directing them. God was leading them. Another interesting story. And the exodus from Egypt for the Israelites, you remember the story where Moses is leading the people out and they get to the sea and they are trapped because the Egyptian army is coming to kill them and so they're trapped between the Egyptian army and the sea and what is it that shows up and protects the Israelites from the Egyptians?

It's a wall of fire. And so here we are in the temple. There are lighting these candles to remember God's presence, God's protection, God's provision, God's leading, and while they are there in that setting, remembering that moment, I want you to imagine Jesus using this exact opportunity to say, I am the light of the world.

Jesus is saying, that I am the light that you must follow towards freedom. I am the light of the world. He is comparing himself to the God who was lighting the path towards the Israelites freedom into the promised land. Jesus believes that he is the one that provided safety for them while they were on the journey. Here we see the Trinity coming together again, don't we? Jesus is saying, I was present in that light that fire.

That is who I am. And he's even making the claim that they need to do the same thing now and that you and I need to do the same thing now that Jesus is the light that we must follow towards freedom, just like God was the light in the Old Testament. He's making the claim that he will guide us and protect us along the way, and if you wonder, did they pick up on what Jesus was saying, or is this just something that a couple thousand years later is nice for theologians to believe is true?

I will prove to you that they knew exactly what Jesus was saying, because look at the response of the Pharisees and verse 13. The Pharisees challenged him. Here you are, Jesus, appearing as your own witness. Your testimony is not valid. They're looking at Jesus basically and saying, how dare you? How dare you claim to be the great I am. What evidence do you have to back up that claim? The Pharisees wanted proof.

Prove to us, because according to their law, you had to have the testimony of at least two witnesses. Three was even better. And they weren't buying the miracles of the words of Jesus. That wasn't enough. And so what else could Jesus do to prove he is who he says, he is. You see the problem here is the Pharisees can only see this from a human perspective.

Humanly speaking, this man was blaspheming, claiming to be God, as well as potentially making their lives miserable because now they are under Roman bondage, even though they're living in the land, they're under Roman authority. And so I imagine the Pharisees are saying, if you are that light, then why don't you lead us just like Moses did out of bondage and out of captivity. So how is Jesus going to respond in verse 14?

Jesus answered. Listen, 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. You see, you judge by human standards while I yet pass judgment on no one, even though he could have. In verse 16, he says, but if I do judge, my decisions are true because I am not alone, I stand with the father who sent me in your own law, it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true.

So I am the one who testifies for myself and my other witness is the father who sent me. Now you can imagine their response, right? Like, what are you talking about? You're just standing by yourself. Where is this father that you talk about? And that is going to be their response. But what Jesus is saying, what he is claiming is just like in the Old Testament when God made the covenant with Abraham. If you

remember when he made that covenant, we read there that God swore by himself because there was no one greater to swear by.

There, the Trinity existed again, the testimony of two or three witnesses. He was making this covenant with Abraham, and he says, I will swear by myself. So Jesus does the same thing. He knows he's not going to understand. But the truth is still truth. And of course they don't get it. And so they respond just like we would. Then they asked him, where is your father? I don't see him anywhere. And Jesus says, you do not know me or my father. For if you knew me, you would know my father also.

He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put, yet no one sees him because his hour had not yet come. This is how we know this is taking place. They're in the temple while these candles are being lit. They're collecting the offering at that specific time. We know that Jesus is using this as an opportunity to make the statement I am the great I am. And the Pharisees are confused. What does this mean? What are you talking about?

This doesn't make any sense. You see, God's ways are so far beyond our ways that it's like trying to teach algebra to an ant. They don't even understand numbers, let alone algebra. And so Jesus is trying to explain this to them, but they just can't make sense of it. There's things that we are never going to understand with our minds, and they also use this as an opportunity for a little dig into Jesus because in this culture, it was very offensive to question who somebody's father was.

You see, there are lineage, their heritage was very important, where they could trace it. And so of course, Joseph is not around at this time. And you can imagine these Pharisees looking at him going, who is your father? Who are you talking about? Where is he? We don't see him. It was a little dig. You see, John uses this story to point again to the truth of his belief. You remember the most important question we will ever answer is, who is Jesus?

And John is very clearly by sharing the stories he's sharing by walking with Jesus by having conversations with Jesus. He is saying again, Jesus was God is God and continues to reveal God. He believed that Jesus was the great I am. Of course, Jesus made that claim here. We go on in versus 21 through 24.

Once more, Jesus said to them, I am going away and you will look for me and you will die in your sin for where I go, you can not come. This made the Jews there asked the question, will he kill himself? Is that why he says where I go? You can not come. They're trying to make sense of this. But Jesus continued. You are from below. I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world.

I told you that you would die in your sins if you do not believe that I am he. You will indeed die in your sins if you do not believe that I am. Jesus is saying, I'm not of this world. It's going to be hard for you to understand. I created this world. The rules of this world did not apply to Jesus unless he chose to let them apply for a time when he experienced death.

Remember, Jesus is going to go on to say, in the book of John, I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the father, except through me. He goes on versus 25 through 30. Who are you, they asked? Just what I've been telling you from the beginning. Could you imagine the frustration? Jesus has been telling him the same thing for years now saying, this is who I am. I am the great I am. I've been telling you, but you're just not hearing me.

You're not understanding. I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is trustworthy. And what I have heard from him, I tell the world Jesus says, I have so much that I want to tell you, but I can't tell you at all because I'm just going to be obedient to the father. I think about when Jesus says this and do you ever have a things in your mind that you want to tell somebody, but you keep it in? You know, you know it's not best to say those things. Jesus says, I have so much that I want to tell you, but I'm going to be obedient to what the father has told me.

And of course, they did not understand that he was telling them about his father. So Jesus said, when you have lifted up the son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but speak just what the father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me, and he has not left me alone for I always do what pleases him, and even as he spoke, John says, many believed in him.

Of course, he's trying to answer their questions, but he continues to speak above their heads. And at this point, Jesus even predicts the way that he is going to die, he says, when you lift me up, then you will recognize. When you lift me up, you will recognize that I only speak and do what the father has told me to do. I am living in complete obedience to the Heavenly Father. It's convenient as you read the other gospels.

That while they were crucifying Jesus, even those Roman soldiers, once he gave up his spirit, it is written that they said he must have been the son of God. When they saw what happened, when you raise me up, then you will finally understand that I am he. As we wrap up today, I ask you the question. Have you allowed Jesus to be your light? For light conquers, darkness.

It only takes a little bit of light to overcome the dark. You see, I am reminded again of sitting in that cave in Tennessee where it was pitch black, complete darkness. You couldn't even see the hand in front of your face, but one small candle sent the darkness running. The darkness can not overcome the light, the light overcomes the darkness. And yet, Jesus isn't making the claim that he is just a small candle that defeats the darkness.

Jesus is saying, I am that pillar of fire. That will lead you and will guide you and will protect you, and so today, maybe you find yourself in darkness. Maybe you came today without hope without direction, and I am here to share with you that Jesus wants to be your light. He wants to be your direction. He wants to guide you. He is the great I am. He will give you hope he will give you purpose.

He will give you meaning, he will protect you. From the enemy, maybe you come today, and you're just lost. You feel like you've just been wandering through life and you're trying to figure things out. Jesus will be your light. One of the things that I've come to recognize in my life is God continues to draw me closer to him that if you're living in this world without Jesus, the world doesn't make sense.

It doesn't have purpose. It doesn't have meaning. You're just going through motions. There's no goal. There's no end. But if you're living with Jesus, the world begins to make sense. You begin to have purpose. You begin to have hope. There is something after this. And so again, maybe you're here today, and you have lost hope. Either because you don't know Jesus, or you knew him, and you kind of just walked away and started doing your own thing, I encourage you to follow his light.

He will change your life. As we've been doing for the last few weeks, we'll have people up on both sides of the front of the sanctuary that are willing to pray with you, pray for you. It doesn't have to be about this particular issue. You can be about anything. It can be about surgeries coming up, health issues, whatever you have. We just love to pray with you. It could be about this. Maybe you've never known Jesus, and you just have some questions. We'd love to answer those for you. Maybe you just want to do your own business with God.

That's why we have the altars up here. You can come and no one's going to bother you. We're not going to bother you. If we see you up here, we'll just let you do your business with God and you can go back to your seat. It's no big deal. But we want you to take your next step towards him today, whatever that is. Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you. That you are the light. That the darkness can not overcome you, but instead the light overcomes the darkness.

We thank you for loving us. We thank you for walking with us. We thank you for caring for us. And for those that are in the darkness right now, I pray that you would reveal yourself to them. That their eyes

would be open to the truth of who you are. Lord, for those of us that have allowed you to be the light in our lives, we just humbly come before you and offer our praise. And our things.

It's in Jesus name we pray. Amen.