

An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN



“The Light of the World”

John 8:12-20

Theme: God sent Jesus Christ to lead lost sinners out of darkness into the true knowledge of God.

Introduction: **[Read text]** Darkness is one of Scripture’s most sobering metaphors. It speaks of ignorance, deception, moral blindness, and separation from God. From the opening pages of Genesis to the closing vision of Revelation, darkness represents life apart from the Creator—life groping, confused, and ultimately lost. The tragedy is that people often grow so accustomed to the dark that they no longer realize how dark it truly is.

It is into *that* darkness that Jesus Christ speaks one of the most staggering claims ever uttered by human lips. In John 8:12, He declares,

“I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”

This is not poetic exaggeration. This is not religious sentiment. This is a divine assertion. Jesus does not say He *shows* the light or *teaches* about the light—He says *He is* the Light. To accept Him is to move from darkness to light. To reject Him is to remain exactly where you are—lost, blind, and separated from the true knowledge of God.

John places this declaration in the context of the Feast of Booths, where massive lamps illuminated the temple courts, commemorating God’s guiding presence in the wilderness. Against that backdrop of blazing religious symbolism, Jesus announces that He—not the temple, not the ritual, not the leaders of Israel—is the true and final Light sent from God.

In this passage, we see three unavoidable realities.

1. **The Blessings of the Light**—the promise that those who follow Christ are delivered from darkness and granted the very life of God (v. 12).
2. **The Brilliance of the Light**—as Jesus defends the truthfulness of His testimony, revealing His unity with the Father and His divine authority (vv. 13–18).
3. **The Blindness to the Light**—the tragic irony that the religious leaders, surrounded by truth, remain in darkness because they do not know God at all (vv. 19–20).

This text confronts us with a sobering question: Are we walking in the light of Christ, or merely standing near it while remaining in the dark? God sent Jesus Christ to lead lost sinners out of darkness into the true knowledge of God—and there is no salvation, no life, and no hope apart from Him.

I. The Blessings of the Light – 8:12

A. The Exposure to the Light

1. This section resumes the narrative that was interrupted by the fiasco involving the woman taken in adultery.

2. In reality, that interruption provides an excellent backdrop for the declarations of Christ concerning His role as the point of focus for the grace and glory of God - being *"light."*
3. This alludes to the second major emphasis of the Feast of Tabernacles – the first being the miracle of God providing water from the rock, which caused Jesus to invite men to come and drink the water He would provide – cp. *v. 7:37.*
4. Resuming His teaching, Jesus now alludes to this second element – the *"I am the Light of the world"* that *"light"* God had provided to the wandering Israelites in the wilderness – cp. *Exodus 13:21; 14:20.*
5. Jesus here indicates that the experience of the children of Israel who received guidance and protection from the "pillar of fire" is available to all – that it foreshadowed *"the light of the world."*
 - a) *The Lord Jesus desires to provide for all men the ability to receive the guidance that He provides*
 - b) *In the person of the Lord Jesus Christ alone is God's glorious attributes able to shine forth most brilliantly amid the darkness of this world.*
 - c) *He serves as the illumination to lost men for spiritual matters and everlasting salvation*
6. John has already used this analogy to describe the mission of the Son of God – cp. *John 1:5; 3:19.*

B. The Effect of the Light

1. For those who will come to the Light, however, there is great benefit – *"he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."*
2. Just as it was necessary for the children of Israel wandering around the wilderness to follow the Light provided by God, even so must we follow the Light provided by God – His Son – Jesus Christ.
3. If we *follow* Him, we can be delivered from groping in the darkness, blind and ignorant of the righteousness of God.
4. To *"follow"* [] possesses two basic elements:
 - a) *First, is to believe in Him or trust Him – cp. *John 7:38.**
 - b) *Second, is to obey Him – keeping His commandments out of gratitude – thereby walking in the light – cp. *1 John 2:8-11.**
5. By following the Lord Jesus Christ, not only are we freed from the moral insensitivities and decadence that characterize those governed by the lusts of the flesh (the world), but we actually possess the *"Light of life"* itself – the Lord Jesus Christ.

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6. This takes us back to the beginning of the book – cp. *John 1:4*.

II. The Brilliance of the Light – 8:13-18

A. The Attempt to Extinguish the Light – v. 13

1. Having listened to Jesus's preaching and teaching over the past 2 ½ years, the Pharisees were well aware of His Messianic "aspirations."
2. They also realized that His claim to be the "*Light of the world*" was a direct claim to deity, as God promised that He Himself would be that provision for them through the Messiah – cp. *Isaiah 60:19-20*.
3. Infuriated, the Pharisees rebuke Jesus for claiming something totally false – an assertion that is completely of His own delusions – "*So the Pharisees said to Him, 'You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true'.*"
4. When they stated that "*Your testimony is not true,*" they meant his assertion is not credible.
5. Once again, the Pharisees demonstrate their inability to "comprehend" the Light – cp. *John 1:5*.
6. Despite their inability to comprehend the Light, they were attempting to discredit Him – similar to what they had done earlier in the week – cp. *John 7:15*.

B. The Answers that Exhibit the Light – vv. 14-18

1. The **Superficiality** of Their Judgment – v. 14-15
 - a) Jesus initial response to the protest that He is asserting Himself with no authority, He "*answered and said to them, 'Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true ...'*"
 - b) That is to say, He indicates that corroborating evidence wouldn't discredit what He is saying – that truth is truth whether it stands alone or finds support.
 - c) However, He goes further to indicate that rather than His testimony about Himself being discredited, the protesting Pharisees themselves are discredited because of their inability to comprehend the realities at stake.
 - d) He says: "*... 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.*"
 - e) Essentially, He declares that the Pharisees "don't have a clue" about God's program and His intended mission for the Messiah.
 - f) He says to them – "you are in no condition to assess this situation, you are disoriented and blinded to the truth."
 - g) Thus, the Pharisees can only "*judge according to the flesh.*"

- h) However, Jesus indicates that He is not so hampered by superficial judgment – *“I am not judging anyone.”*
 - i) Clearly, Jesus did not come to judge, but to give men the Light by which they might follow and be led to God.
2. The **Sanctity** of His Judgment – **v. 16**
- a) The next response He gives indicates that everything He undertakes – even judgment – is sacred because He is not its originator – the Father is: *“But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me.”*
 - b) Everything that Jesus says or does is yielded to the Father’s will – so that if He were to judge, it would not be a judgment that originated with Him but would reflect the Father’s judgment.
 - c) Hence, Jesus’ testimony is not the judgment of a mere man but of God Himself, thereby making it sacred.
3. The **Substantiation** of His Testimony – **vv. 17-18**
- a) He then appeals to such corroboration as the Law itself requires – *“Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true.”*
 - b) If two agree, then every word is established – and *“I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.”*
 - c) What greater verification could these men desire than the testimonies that God the Father had already provided – cp. **John 5:37-38**.
 - (1) He had borne witness to them through the **PROPHECIES** of the Old Testament.
 - (2) He had borne witness to them through the **PROCLAMATIONS** of John the Baptist
 - (3) He had borne witness to them through the **PRONOUNCEMENT** at His baptism
 - (4) He had borne witness to them through the **POWER** of the signs and wonders wrought by Christ.

III. **The Blindness to the Light – 8:19-20**

A. **The Disability of the Unbeliever – vv. 19a**

1. The Pharisees' response reveals their profound disability – they could not exercise any spiritual discernment because they were spiritually dead.
2. Instead of seeing Jesus’ reference to His Father as referring to God, they immediately think of Joseph, who was most likely dead at this point, *“so they were saying to Him, ‘Where is Your Father?’”*
3. They were completely blind to God’s desire to redeem fallen man from his sin through the work of His Son.
4. In reality, they were progressively growing harder of heart as they avoided the issues raised by Christ and maneuvered to outwit Him.

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B. The Denouncement of Unbelief – v. 19b-20

1. Jesus responds by directly addressing their inability: *“You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also.”*
2. If they possessed the necessary faith to accept the glory of God in the Lord Jesus Christ, they would discern in Him the God who is in intimate communion with Him.
3. As it stood, they did not accept what they saw in Jesus because they did not know what they were seeing – they had no knowledge of God.
4. This disability was the very reason the *“Light of the World”* was provided – to lead lost men to a saving knowledge of God
5. We are given contextual details that help us see greater symbolism in what Jesus says: *“These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; ...”*
 - a) The *“treasury”* was located in the Court of the Women, the most public area of the temple complex.
 - b) During the Feast of Tabernacles, four enormous golden lampstands were erected in the Court of the Women, each standing 75 feet tall. When lit, they illuminated the entire city of Jerusalem.
 - (1) According to the Mishnah (Sukkah 5:2-4), they were erected and dismantled annually just for the Feast.
 - (2) They were fueled by enormous bowls of oil that burned wicks made from worn-out priestly garments.
 - (3) They were tended by Levite young men who would climb ladders.
 - c) They symbolized God's faithfulness to Israel during the wilderness wanderings, as he provided the pillar of fire to illuminate and warm them at night.
 - d) They also depicted the former glory of God that once filled the Temple but had departed, according to Ezekiel, because of Israel's idolatry, and it demonstrated Israel's desire for that glory to return.
 - e) By declaring Himself *“the light of the world”* as the lampstands stood dark in the very place where the glory-light had been commemorated during the festival, Jesus was saying that the glory had returned and that the presence of God stood before them – ***Isaiah 9:2; John 1:5.***
6. We are then reminded of the upcoming events in which Jesus would offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sin – *“... and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.”*
7. The total rejection of Jesus hardened the people to the point of murderous intent, yet because of the Father's specific purposes and plans that Jesus be offered as the final Passover lamb on the Day of Atonement six months



later, *“no one seized Him.”* – cp. Acts 2:22-24.

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So What?

1. How does my daily conduct demonstrate that I possess “the light of life,” not just religious knowledge?
2. When Scripture confronts my thinking, do I submit – or do I resist like the Pharisees?
3. How can a person be surrounded by Scripture and spiritual activity yet still not truly know God?
4. If Jesus evaluated my knowledge of God, would it be relational and saving – or merely external and intellectual?

Theme: God sent Jesus Christ to lead lost sinners out of darkness into the true knowledge of God.