

It was the Feast of Tabernacles, one of three annual feasts of Israel. Passover in the Spring, Shavuot or Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), 7 weeks after Passover, and Succoth or Feast of Booths in the Fall five days after Yom Kippur. One of the best parts of this week-long festival was an impressive "light show." On the first day of the feast, four seventy-five-foot-high candlesticks were erected on the Temple Mount. (photo of Olympic cauldron in LA Coliseum) Historians say that the light from these huge candles lit up all the courtyards of Jerusalem. The Talmud which is the commentary on how to apply all the OT laws, states that at the base of the candles, "Men of piety and good deeds would dance... with lighted torches in their hands, singing songs and praises. Levites without number with harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets, and other musical instruments (were) there." (Sukkah 51 a-b; 53a). This was a joyous celebration. It was against this backdrop that Jesus stood in the temple courts and shouted, "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).

The Pharisees' response to this audacious declaration was swift...Jn. 8:13. "You lie." Remember Joe Wilson, the South Carolina Congressman who interrupted a speech by President Obama to a joint session of congress by shouting, "you lie?" Awkward! He later apologized to President Obama but there would be no apology from the Pharisees. They were experts in the scriptures and they knew Jesus was claiming oneness with the Creator. They knew that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light." Gen. 1:1-3. Our Creator God took what was formless and shaped it. He entered the empty space and filled it with life. He reached into the darkness and replaced it with light. When Jesus said, "I am the light of the world," He was claiming to be the source of light. **Jesus is the source of light.**

Light is a prominent theme in John's gospel. Right out of the gate John echoes the words of Genesis 1 when he says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." John 1:1-5

John used darkness to symbolize not only sin and evil but unbelief and confusion. Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. Judas betrays Jesus at night. Peter denies Jesus at night. A confused and grieving Mary Magdalene visits Jesus' tomb "while it was still dark." We are all "in the dark" until the life of Jesus lights up our life, and then we can see. We have the light of life, light that comes from the One who created light and life. Because He is the light...

**Jesus chases away the darkness.** The biblical account of this world is that we are in bondage to sin, ignorance and death. According to the Bible, we were born into the "domain of darkness." What does that mean? A domain is a realm of authority. I don't need to tell you there is a great darkness that shrouds this world and it seems to get darker every day. There is the darkness of death through terrorism and drug overdoses, and police shootings and cop killings and child abuse and the list could go on and on. But there is also the darkness of ignorance and confusion. As unbelief grows so does confusion. People used to know what that was growing in a mother's womb. Not anymore. Everyone knew how to define marriage. Not anymore. Today we are even confused about the definition of male and female. It just keeps getting darker.

It is no coincidence that John 9 begins with the story of a man who was born blind. He represents all of us...9:1-41. (9:16, reminds me of the man who was looking to buy a bird dog. Dog ran across the top of the water picked up the duck and brought it back. "There," the owner said, "did you notice anything special about that dog?" "Yes," the skeptic said, "He can't swim.") The Pharisees refused to acknowledge the miracle. They could only see the breaking of the Sabbath because of their darkened hearts. There is more than one blind man in this story.

Darkness is nothing new. It was dark in Isaiah's day. "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." Is. 9:2. Matthew declared that this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus when He began His public ministry. (Mt. 4:16). Jesus brought light into the world. We can respond to light it two ways:

1. We can hide from the it. The path to spiritual defeat and discouragement begins with the decision to hide in the dark. Adam and Eve tried that approach. They hid from God. They may have been naked but they were covered with shame. Ps. 32:3-4 says, "For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer." We are only as sick as our secrets.

2. We can walk in it. How can I walk in the light? I can start by confessing the darkness in my own life. Confession is the off ramp out of the domain of darkness. Confession simply exposes my sin to the light so it can be forgiven. The psalmist continues in v. 5, "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." Therefore, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit." Ps. 32:1-2

Jesus rescued us from the domain of darkness so we could walk in the light. Listen to Col. 1:12-14 says, "(He) has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

When I confess, (homologeo), I am saying the same thing Jesus says about my behavior. I am saying that Jesus is light, the ultimate standard for what is right and wrong. He is light from above. That's why, later in the chapter, He said to the Pharisees, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. Therefore, I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that **I AM (He)**, you will die in your sins." John 8:23-24. Jesus is the light of the world that chases away the darkness but here is an amazing thing.

**Jesus calls us to be light-bearers in the world.** In Mt. 5:14-16, Jesus says, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

This was God's purpose for His people from the beginning. The Jews believed that the Messiah would lead the people of Israel to bring light to all people. "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Is. 49:6.

We have been called to punch holes in the darkness. What does it mean to be the light of the world? If you are the light of the world wherever you go darkness must flee...boredom must die because you are living out your God-given purpose every day...injustice must cease, it cannot stand because you will not stand for it. Racism, bigotry, xenophobia, hatred in all its forms cannot prosper around you because Jesus is the light of the world and He is in you which makes you the light of the world and the light extinguishes the darkness.

When you walk in the light nothing will be the same again. When you have Him as your light everything looks different even suffering and death. The light of Christ will be a soft glow to comfort you in your lonely room after a devastating loss. It will be a lamp on your troubled path. It will reveal the wise and loving face of God behind every frowning setback.

Yesterday was a hard day for me. Much harder for a young couple who were preparing to welcome a child into their family. Eight months into the pregnancy they learned that their little boy would not be born alive. I can't think of a darker day than the day a mom and dad lose a child. So yesterday we gathered at the cemetery, around a little box, and into that darkness the light of the world showed up. A grieving father fought back the tears as he said, "This experience has deepened my faith. God knows what it feels like to lose a son." We sang together...

There in the ground His body lay,  
Light of the world by darkness slain;  
Then bursting forth in glorious day,  
Up from the grave He rose again!  
And as He stands in victory,  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me;  
For I am His and He is mine—  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

That precious child was transported from the darkness of his mother's womb into the glorious light of His Heavenly Father. That journey is one that all who walk in the light will take some day. Revelation 21 gives us a hint of what it will be like when we get to that Celestial City where we will live with Jesus forever. "And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there." Rev. 21:23-25.

Step into the light and let Jesus lead you home. God has brought you into this world for a reason. You are the light of the world. So let your light shine before men.