

Jesus, The Light of the World

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John 8:12

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So we live in a day, it's pretty easy to say, that is marked by confusion. A lot of it, right? Confusion in our world, confusion in morality, confusion in theology, in leadership, in government, in entertainment, in education. It's like a fog has rolled in. A fog of darkness and doubt. A fog of error. A fog of confusion. A fog that makes it hard to know up from down, right from wrong, truth from error. Where what is evil is now good, and what is good is now evil into the darkness of this confusion steps Jesus of Nazareth, who declares with clarity and conviction, John 8:12, "I am the light of the world." There's a mountain of truth in these seven words. A mountain of truth that when we embrace them, it brings clarity to our confusion. It brings certainty into our doubt. It brings truth into a world full of lies.

What does it mean for Jesus to be the light of the world? We've heard that phrase about Him, but what does it mean? What does it mean that He is the light of the world? Well, to answer that, let's start with this. **Point #1) The Light Celebrated. The Light Celebrated.** According to 7:2, the context of these words is the Feast of Tabernacles. This is a holiday week in the fall when every Jewish male over 20 was expected to be in Jerusalem. So as you think about Jesus saying these words, picture tens of thousands of people filling Jerusalem in the Temple Mount. In the Temple complex itself, in what was called the Court of the Women, right outside the central building of the Temple itself, there was a patio, and in this patio the priest would set up four giant lamp stands. They're made out of gold, and each lamp stand had four golden bowls on top of those lamp stands.

Four young men would climb these ladders with a jug full of oil and they would dump it into these bowls so that they could light them, these lamps, and so the light would fill all of Jerusalem. It may have looked something like this. Now, it's not clear in the Jewish sources whether these lamps were lit every night, or they were lit on the last day of the feast only, but according to 7:37, this is the last day of the feast, when Jesus says that He is the light of the world. So either they are about to be lit, or when He says it, they are lit.

Now, if you're like, "Wait a minute, there's a whole day that happens in between there from 7:53 to 8:11." Well, remember the woman caught in adultery was likely added after John completed this book. So the message that I did before Easter covered this, but you can ask me after at the door. John's original was exactly how I read it, from 7:52. The very next thing that John wrote was what we have in our Bibles, 8:12. It is said that these lamps were so bright that they filled the entire city with light. So all night long this light is shining, all the way until sunrise. The greatest and holiest men of Israel would joyfully sing and they would dance with lit torches in their hands. They're singing and they're dancing as the priests are playing instruments and the

people are up on the ledges looking down into the patio, singing and rejoicing as well and on their mind as they are worshipping the Lord is two things, primarily.

First, is the Exodus. If you remember that event, there was a pillar of fire, which was a symbol of God's presence with His people and that pillar of fire led the people at night out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. What was their job with that pillar of fire? It was really complicated, right? When it left, you just follow it. The pillar of fire not only led the Israelites, but it also protected them from their enemies. Like the Egyptians when they tried to attack and kill all the Israelites, the pillar of fire went in front so that they were protected as they crossed the Red Sea from Egypt to Saudi Arabia.

Second, the light reminded them of the Messiah, who in the words of Isaiah 9:2, "Would be a great light." In Isaiah 49:6, "He would be a light for the nations, and that salvation may reach to the end of the earth." So here they are singing and dancing. They're celebrating. They're worshipping God. They're worshipping Him for His provision and His protection in the past they are anticipating His provision and protection through the Messiah in the future.

It is into this religious and biblical context that Jesus said that He is the light of the world, and where exactly was He when He said these words? Take a look at 8:20. It says, "These words he spoke in the treasury as he taught in the Temple." Now, the Temple treasury, interestingly, was located in the Court of the Women. So Jesus proclaims Himself the light of the world standing in the Court of the Women, standing near or maybe standing under these four giant lamp stands. The text doesn't say it, but if it was evening, and the lamps were lit in this moment, and the light is filling the city, and he's like, I'm the light, not just of this city, I'm the light of the world. That would have been awesome. I don't know, but picturing that, I was like, that would be amazing.

Now from the light, celebrated the feast. Let's look next to *point #2) The Light Clarified. The Light Clarified*. There is a mountain of truth, like I said in verse 12. I kind of toyed with just summarizing it briefly and then moving on to preach the rest of the paragraph, but then I remembered that you love God's Word and you like to go deep a little bit. So, with you in mind, I have 10 explanations, 10 descriptions, 10 clarifications of what Jesus meant when He called Himself the light of the world. And I want you to notice right off the bat that Jesus doesn't say that He has the light, but what? He is the light. So with this, Jesus is saying, this is who I really am. This is the truth about me. He is revealing reality about Himself with this phrase, this imagery, the light of the world.

So first, being the light of the world means Jesus is the only light. Jesus is the only light. That word I in Greek is not necessary. It is added for emphasis. In fact, His words could be translated, "The light of the world am I," showing that He is putting stress on that first letter, that first word, I. In other words, the I here could mean, I and I only, I and I alone. I and no other am the light of the world. So Jesus is the only light, and second, Jesus is the divine light. The divine light. Those words, I am, I and I only am, reach all the way back to Exodus chapter 3, and God saying that His name is I am. The always existing one. The never having a beginning and never having an ending one. The eternal one.

Remember the lamp stands in the Temple that He is speaking from underneath in some sense, reminding people of the presence of God. By saying He is the light of the world in that moment, He is strongly implying here that He is their God, the one they are there worshipping in that moment. He is truly God. He is divine in every way that God is. We can see this in 1:1 of John, where it says, "The Word was God and the Word is Jesus."

"He is the only, the one-of-a-kind God," according to John 1:18. "When Jesus called God His Father, or Jesus called Himself the Son of God," we saw in the last message, John 5:18, "when He says that He is 'making himself equal with God.'" Beyond that, there's Titus 2:13, where He is called our great God and Savior, or Hebrews 1:8, where the Father Himself uses the word God to identify Jesus. That is why John writes this book, to prove the unbelievable truth that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, is in fact God.

So as the words, "I am the light of the world," rolled off of Jesus' lips, He's declaring Himself to be their God. Jesus is the divine light, and third, He is the true light. The true light. Notice He does not say that He is a light of the world, like He's merely just one of many lights that are out there. No, He is the light of the world. John 1:9, "Jesus is the true light." Which means that in a world full of so-called lights that claim to speak for God, that claim to have revelation from God, that claim to explain reality accurately, that claim to give truth, Jesus proclaims that He is the only, He is true light of the world.

Saving light therefore is not something that is natural to humanity. Saving truth is not found within us. It is found outside of us. It is not natural to humans, which means that the best of the greatest empires in history, Egyptian and Babylonian and Persian and Greek and Roman, all the way down to this day, whether it's in the past Chinese empires or Byzantine empires or Spanish or the UK, or even the American empire, the best that we could possibly have is to have the light. That these are marked by spiritual darkness when it comes to saving truth. The greatest men of all of those empires. The reason and philosophy and science and politics and authority and organization, all of that. It is darkness when it comes to spiritual truth. There is only one true light, and it is Christ.

Always remember, any subject in school, any person you meet, at best, they can merely have the light. Jesus is the light. He brings clarity into confusion. He brings certainty into doubt. When He speaks, it is true, because He is the light. When He speaks about God, it is true. When He speaks about human beings, it is true. When He speaks about creation, it is true. When He speaks about men and women in marriage, it is true. When He speaks about Himself, it is true. If He says it, it is true, because he is the true light.

Forth, Jesus is the saving light. He is the saving light. He is the light of the world in that He is the light for the world, for the benefit, for the blessing, for the salvation of the world. So light has different meanings based on context. It can mean physical light, but it can also have figurative meanings in the Bible as well. It can refer to God's holiness, for instance. Like 1 John 1:5, which says that "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."

Now, when used for Jesus in John, light means truth that saves. Because you think about, what does it mean for Him to be the light? Jesus is the truth that saves, which connects perfectly to Isaiah 49:6. Speaking about the Messiah, God says this. "I will make the Messiah a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." So there's a connection there between the Messiah being the light and salvation reaching to the end of the earth. Why? Because the Messiah is the truth that saves. So into the darkness of spiritual ignorance and idolatry, Jesus shines truth. Into the darkness of sin, Jesus shines salvation. Into the darkness of death, Jesus shines eternal life. He came to give us the truth about God. He came to save us from sin and death. We've seen this already in John. He's the water of life in chapters 4 and chapter 7. He's the bread of life in chapter 6, and now, in chapter 8, He is the light of life.

John 1:4, his quote, "His life was the light of men." In other words, in His life, the light of saving truth has come to us. He is the saving light, and fifth, He is the people's light. The people's light. Notice He is the light of the world. Like the word light, the word world has many definitions based on context too. So it can mean the planet, the ball floating in space. But in John, this word world has two main features. First, it refers to humanity in rebellion against God. That's why Jesus will say, John 15, "If the world hates you, just know that it hated me first." It is a description of humanity in rebellion against God. Second, the word world refers to Gentiles in contrast to Jews. So in the Bible there are kinds of people, and there are only two kinds of people, Jews and Gentiles, Jews and non-Jews.

You can hear this in Isaiah 42 and Isaiah 49, where the Messiah is called, "A light to the nations." Not just a light to the nation of Israel, but a light to the nations. That He's not just the Messiah for the Jews, He's the Messiah for all kinds of people. Like Revelation 5 says, "Every tribe, every language, every ethnicity, every nation, He is the Savior, He is the light for them all."

So world in John does not mean every person without exception, every single person individually. The word world in John means every person without distinction. What does that mean? Well, Jew and Gentile, no distinction. He saves them all. Men and women, young and old, rich, and poor, ruler and the ruled, the healthy and the sick. Any kinds of people that you can come up with, He can save. He will save them all. He is the light for all of them. No group excluded. He's the light of salvation for all humanity. It's John 4:42, "He is indeed the Savior of the world."

Let's think about this so far. So far, we have seen Jesus claim to be God. He has claimed to be the only way of salvation, not just for the Jewish people, but for all humanity. Now, we hear that and we're like, "Yeah, of course." But listen, that is sheer arrogance, total arrogance, and insanity, unless what? It's true. Unless it's true, right? So He doesn't allow us to stay on the fence about Him. You notice that? Jesus says things that force us to respond.

Well, that's five down. Still with me? Yeah? Told you, a mountain of truth in this phrase, "I am the light of the world." You got room for five more? You're excited. All right, well, we're going to go anyway. Six, Jesus is the promised light. He's the promised light. As I said earlier, Jesus fulfilled prophecy, and part of the prophecy of the Messiah is that He will be the light. Light is

actually one of the many titles in the Old Testament for the Messiah. We already saw that the Messiah would be a light who brings salvation to the end of the earth in Isaiah 49:6. I've quoted it three times now. But Isaiah 42:6 says God would make the Messiah "a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." Those who are blind to truth, those who are prisoners to idolatry, to sin, to death, Jesus, the light, will set them free.

When Jesus was eight days old, He was presented at the Temple, and there was a man there named Simeon and as he was holding Jesus, he proclaimed, "My eyes have seen your salvation, that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." Funny thing, in John 7:52, the religious leaders, you remember, they scold Nicodemus by saying, "Search and see that no prophet comes from Galilee." The very next thing that John writes is 8:12, where Jesus says, "I am the light of the world," which is a reference to Isaiah 9:1, where it says, "The Messiah will come from Galilee." Whoops. "No prophet comes from Galilee." Well, just the Messiah, that's all.

Isaiah 9:1 puts it this way. "In the latter time, He has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness, those Gentiles have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness on Him, on them has light shown." So now when Jesus calls Himself the light of the world, He's not only calling Himself God, He's not only saying He's the only way of salvation for all of humanity, He's also saying that He is the prophesied, long-awaited promised Messiah.

Seven, Jesus is the leading light. The leading light. Notice verse 12, "I am the light of the world, whoever follows me..." Stop there. Like being in the dark and following a light to get out, so Jesus, the light, is to be followed to get out of sin, to get out of death, to get out of hell. Like the Israelites, remember with the pillar of fire? What did they do? Just followed it. So we are to follow Christ. The word follow means the same thing as to believe. It's not a casual, occasional tip of the hat to Jesus when you think about Him. No, it means to trust in Him, to commit yourself to Him, to attach yourself to Him, to adopt His teachings as your standard, to adopt His life as your example. It means that He never follows you, because when you follow Him, He becomes your leader, your Lord, your God, your King, with you now as his subject, his servant, even his slave, no will of your own. Your will is now gone. Replaced. Replaced by His will for your life.

We come to Him for salvation, and the requirement is belief, or in the words of the text, "Follow me." So like a student to his teacher, like a traveler to his guide, a soldier to his general, a servant to his master, a sheep to its shepherd, Christians follow Christ. By the way, this is permanent. This is a lifelong commitment to Jesus, or you simply just prove that you were never really a follower if you suddenly stop following Him.

Jesus is the leading light. In eighth, he is the exposing light. The exposing light. It's the light of the world. Verse 12, those who follow him, quote, what? "Will not walk in darkness." In other words, Jesus will rescue His followers from darkness. As the light, He exposes the darkness to be

what it is, to be truly darkness when it is compared to Him. So what is darkness here? What does He mean by this word? Well, it is a figure of speech, just like the word light. It is a figure of speech for spiritual ignorance of God, idolatry. It's a figure of speech for lies about God, for sin, and for spiritual death that sin brings. So darkness is conflict towards God. It's conflict in the way that we think. It's conflict in the things that we feel. It's conflict in the things that we want, and it is conflict in how we live. It is this rebellious world. It is our wretched flesh. It is the devil himself. It is everything that stands in opposition to God. That is what it means to be the darkness.

In John 1:5, "Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness." The darkness of sin, the darkness of air and idolatry, the darkness of all forms of rebellion, all of it, "has not overcome the light." You just think about light. Darkness cannot conquer the smallest little piece of light, and all of the collected darkness of this entire world cannot overcome the light that is Christ. Cannot ever overcome Him. Rebellion will no longer be what His people notice what they walk in. Their existence, the way they think, how they feel, what they want, what they do will begin to be dominated less and less by rebellion and more and more by light and truth and listen, just like in the world, far easier than stumbling around in the darkness, is walking in the light.

So Jesus is the exposing light, and ninth, He is the permanent light. The permanent light. This light won't ever go out. "Notice whoever follows me will have the light of life." He is permanent in at least two ways in this verse. First, He is the permanent possession of His followers. Notice we have Him and the idea of that word is that we cannot ever un-have Him. Or having Him means a lasting, lifelong commitment, relationship, transformation that happens. His leadership of our lives doesn't abandon us halfway, but He takes His followers all the way to the second thing that is permanent in this text, which is that He gives permanent life.

So we permanently have the light, which is Jesus, and notice with Him, we also have life. The word life here means eternal life. Life that belongs to God. Life that is alive permanently, just like God's life is alive permanently. All the so-called lights that people trust in, that people are hoping in, that people attach their lives to, all of those lights will blow out in the valley of the shadow of death. But Jesus, the light of the world, is a permanent light that cannot ever go out.

Which means finally number 10, Jesus is the separating light, just like light separates light from darkness. So Jesus separates people into those who follow Him and those who refuse. Those who suicidally continue to live and walk and exist in that darkness. To those who lived in the darkness of idolatry, Jesus offered the one true God. To those who lived in the darkness of human tradition, Jesus offered them truth. To those who lived in the darkness of sin, Jesus offered salvation. To those who lived in the darkness of death, Jesus offered eternal life, and yet sadly, tragically, most of the people there that day who heard these words with their own ears, they refuse. The greatest gift imaginable. Set free from sin's penalty, set free from eternal death, set free from slavery to sin and Satan, and they refuse.

These 10 clarifications about Jesus being the light of the world reveal the real Jesus. This is the real guy. This is the truth about who He really is. There are all kinds of Jesus' out there, all kinds

of imposters. The real Jesus matches what we've seen in our text today. Which brings us all to **point #3) The Light Communicated. The Light Communicated.** Once Jesus communicated that He is the light of the world to the people who were there that day, it left each one of them with a decision, follow Him or flee from Him. In the same way that's true for us. After I've communicated the truth about Jesus, that he is the light of the world, all of you are left with the same decision, follow Him, or flee from Him.

To flee from Christ is to remain in the darkness of idolatry, worshiping false gods, false religions, false ideologies instead of Jesus, the one true light. To flee from Christ is to remain in the darkness of sin awaiting judgment, and a godless eternity where everything good and everything true and everything beautiful is gone forever. Where only guilt dominates your conscience and regret tears at your soul. Where you will long to be set free, long to be saved, but it will be too late. To flee from Christ, like most of the people did that day, is to remain in the darkness of the evil one, the devil, who holds people captive to do his will, who deceives people as the angel of light to convince them to follow his ways and demand his desires and promote his lies as the truth.

Listen, you can be set free from all of that. All of it. Just come to Christ. He says, verse 12, "Whoever." Isn't that a beautiful, wonderful, incredible word? Whoever. Doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter where you're from. Doesn't matter what language you speak. Doesn't matter who your people are. Doesn't matter what you have done. Doesn't matter what's been done to you. Even if you are a Satanist here right now, He says, "Whoever follows me will not ever walk in darkness but will permanently have eternal life."

In the words of John 3:19, "The light has come into the world" and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. Do not love the darkness to your own destruction. People lost in the dark will scramble and crawl and inch their way through intense pain just to go towards the light to be set free. The light actually invites people to be free from the darkness. Jesus says, "You can't free yourself. You can't inch your way. You are fatally trapped. But I will grab you. I will pull you out. I will save you because I am the light of the world." Jesus offers to set you free from all darkness, all of it. None of that darkness can possibly overpower Him. So end your rebellion and believe in Him. Become a follower of Jesus instead of yourself. A follower of Jesus instead of some so-called light, some organization, instead of the devil, and instead follow Him and He will set you free.

Listen, if you have been set free, if you are one of His followers, this same title, the light of the world, is also used for you. Matthew 5:14, Jesus speaking said, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. No, they light a lamp and put it on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house." Then He says, "In the same way as lighting a lamp and putting it on a stand, 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."

So we, too, are the light of the world, but we're lights like the moon is a light, right? So He's the only light. We're lights like the moon. Like the moon reflecting the sun, we reflect Jesus, who is the light of the world. But Jesus says the primary way that we do that is how we live our lives. As light, we are to live our lives in such a way that in our obedience, in our holiness, people see how wonderful God is. It's like recessed lighting. The goal of recessed lighting, when you see it, you know what you don't see? You don't see the light. All you see is what? What the light is shining on and that's the idea. That people see our lives and go, "Your God is amazing. That He's done that in your life, that He's changed your life, that you are this now. Tell me more about this God who changed your life."

That's the idea of this text. In the words of Matthew 5:16, "People give glory to God because of our good works." Now, easy to do that? No. We need God's strength to do that, obviously. The goal to strive for with God's grace? Yes, that's it. So at home, at work, at school, you are, we are, I am the light of the world. Let's show people how great our God is by not hiding our commitment in the closet, but coming out of the closet, "I'm a Christian," and then living in such a way that it makes it obvious that we belong to Jesus in the way we live our lives in truth and in love and in hard work and kindness and patience and purity and trustworthiness and goodness, and on and on and on.

Paul takes this idea and runs with it in Ephesians chapter 5, starting in verse 8, where he says, "At one time you were darkness." Anybody agree with that? "One time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." That's what you are. "You are light in the Lord," and he continues, "walk as children of light, for the fruit of life coming out of our lives is found in all that is good and right and true and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness." So we're no longer darkness. That's the past. No longer existing in the darkness of idolatry and lies and sin and death. We are now light in the Lord. We're now children of light, people who are to be characterized by the light, that is, lives that are marked by what we just saw, what is good, what is right, what is true, and seeking to know and do what pleases the Lord. Again, our will, gone. Now all we want is His will. What does He want is what dominates our thoughts.

In that way we show we're children of light, and we also show we're children of light by not going back to our former sinful ways like a dog going back to snack on its vomit. In the words of Philippians 2:15, may we live like God's children "without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted," and I would add confused, "generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." May that be true for us. That in the midst of this crazy, confused world full of lies and spin, that Christ's people shine, reflecting the fact that He is the light of the world.

You did not know that all that truth is going to be found in one verse, did you? I told you, mountain of truth in verse 12, and truly, we have only scratched the surface. I didn't talk about light in the Old Testament. I didn't talk about light in the coming kingdom. I didn't talk about darkness of depravity and how that works. I didn't talk about any of that. There's a lot that was left in the cutting room floor, but maybe you've heard this. I've heard it said that the Bible is so

deep, so mind-stretching, that a fleet of Titanic's could sink in it and yet it is so shallow, so easy to understand, that an infant can play in it and that's because these words in your Bible are the words of an infinite mind. A mind with unending wisdom and knowledge that has been dumbed way down, way down, so that we can understand it. One theologian calls the Bible, God's baby talk. His goo goo gaga, so that we could just scratch the surface of His infinite mind.

Well, with that in mind, you only really know a fraction of what it means for Jesus to be the light of the world. But based on what you know, the issue is no longer what does it mean? The issue now is what are you going to do about it? What are you going to do with Him? As the team comes back up, let's pray.

Jesus, it is right for us to take a step back and to stand in awe of you. The truths that we have heard today put you on such a pedestal that you are far beyond us, and yet you became one of us to save us from our sins. That is a gift of grace that we will spend endless ages worshipping you for, and rightly so. Jesus, what we have seen today is not just awesome and awe-inspiring, it is also challenging. It challenges us at the very core of who we are, because at our core, it's either us as Lord, or you as Lord. So I pray that you will do the work in our souls that all of us need, because you are the light of the world. We pray these things in your wonderful name. Amen.