

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

Jesus: Light of the World

John 8:12

This morning is our 23rd installment of our study through the Gospel of John. Once again we want to remind ourselves that John, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is giving to us a curated collection of moments in the life of Jesus. They come to us in large chunks. In each of them we see God incarnate on mission in the world. More than the other three Gospels John shows us God incarnate stepping into the lives of individuals. John discloses the overarching purpose of these accounts:

John 20:30–31 (ESV) ³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

In **John 8** we come to another very large piece of narrative that gives to us the account of what happened on the heels of the Feast of Tabernacles.

In chapter 7 Jesus made the most amazing, radical declaration on the Great Day of the Feast of Tabernacles;

John 7:37–39 (ESV) ³⁷.... “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ” ³⁹Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Jesus was telling the massive crowd that HE is the life-giving presence of God!

In John 7:43 John tells us that *there was a division among the people over him*. Look at these phrases: **Some** of the people said.... **Others** said... But **some** said.... **Some** of them wanted to arrest him, **but no one** laid hands on him. The men that were sent to arrest Jesus came back empty handed and said “No one ever spoke like this man!” The religious leaders said the people who thought Jesus might be

the Messiah didn't know the law and basically said that the people disagreeing with them were accursed (John 7:49).

In our last study we learned that John 7:53-8:11 is not in the oldest manuscripts. That means that in those older manuscripts John 8:12 attaches itself to that amazing, radical, self-disclosing declaration of Jesus on the Great Day of the feast

In the older manuscripts John 7:52 is followed by the word the word *again* (which is the first word in the Gk. text of 8:12)

John 8:12 (ESV) ¹²Again Jesus spoke to them,

DON'T MISS THIS — Jesus is about to make a second absolutely radical, self-disclosing declaration in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles.

BOTH declarations were tied to the two great ceremonies during the Feast of Tabernacles. One, as we have seen, was the pouring out of the water. The other was called the Illumination of the temple; it took place in the treasury at the beginning of the feast. It was a spectacular celebration.

In the center of the treasury four great torches were set up. Some accounts say that the torches were as high as the highest walls of the temple and that at the top of these golden candelabra were great bowls holding sixty-five liters of oil. There was a ladder for each candelabrum, and in the evening young, healthy priests would carry the oil up to the top, where they would light the protruding wicks. Massive flames would leap out of these torches that lit up the whole temple and much of Jerusalem. It was spectacular! The *Mishnah* describes what happened after the torches were lit:

Men of piety and good works used to dance before them with burning torches in their hands singing songs and praises and countless Levites played on harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets and instruments of music.¹

¹ Sukkah 5:2-3, *The Mishna*, trans. Herbert Danby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933).¹

They would dance until dawn celebrating the great pillar of fire that led the people of Israel during their sojourn in the wilderness.

The light from the temple area shed its glow all over Jerusalem. It was against that background that Jesus declares.

John 8:12 (ESV) ¹²Again “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

This morning we’re going to look at how the word **light** was loaded with tremendous meaning in the hearts of those who heard Jesus say “I am the light of the World.”

LIGHT is key to understanding the story line of the Bible. I pray that we will leave this morning with a sense of awe at the magnificent continuity of this collection of 66 books that we call the Bible.

Those who heard Jesus say “I am the light of the world” would have immediately thought of the very first reference to **light** in the very first chapter of the very first book of the Bible — The book of Genesis (The Book of Beginnings). They would have remembered that in the beginning God spoke light into existence.

***Genesis 1:3-4 (ESV)** And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.
⁴And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

They understood that after speaking light into existence He **separated** the light from the darkness.

No small side note — Throughout the 66 books of the Bible this becomes a metaphor of what God does in human lives and in human history. In the vernacular of digital technology we would say that this **predominant** theme **hyperlinks** throughout the rest of the Scriptures.

They didn’t understand the scientific connection between life and light as we do — but they understood that **life began with God** — and it **began with light**.

Those who heard Jesus say “I am the light of the world” would have immediately thought of the way LIGHT was such a huge part of the second book of the Bible — the **Exodus**.

***Exodus 13:21-22 (ESV)** And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. ²²The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.*

***Exodus 14:19-20 (ESV)** And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: ²⁰And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.*

The light of that **pillar of fire by night** was the manifestation of God’s presence among them. The light of the presence of God led the people as they came out of bondage and slavery in Egypt (Ex. 13:21–22). The light of the very presence of God protected them from those who would destroy them on their way to the land God had promised to them (Ex. 14:19–25)

LIGHT also plays a huge role at the **end** of the book of **Exodus**. God gave Moses detailed instructions for the building of the Tabernacle. God’s glory came to dwell among them at the Tabernacle.

***Exodus 40:38 (ESV)** For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.*

Also — within the Tabernacle was a golden lamp stand giving light within the Holy Place. And finally — in the Holy of holies — where there were no openings for light — there was the manifest presence of God — the *Shekinah Glory* — giving light!

But for those who heard Jesus say “I am the light of the world” the theme of light in the Old Testament went beyond Genesis and Exodus.

The theme of light would have jacked up in front of them like a massive wave in the **Book of Psalms**! The word **light** is all over the song book of Israel where it is living metaphor for the **Word** of God; the **teachings** of God, and the **commands** that He gives us that are to **inform** and **govern** our conduct and our behavior and our life. The Psalms tell us that when God speaks, He is bringing **light** into our life to **illuminate** our path.

*Psalm 19:8 (ESV) the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, **enlightening** the eyes;*

*Psalm 119:105 (ESV) Your word is **a lamp** to my feet and **a light** to my path.*

*Psalm 119:130 (ESV) The unfolding of your words **gives light**; it imparts understanding to the simple.*

*Psalm 43:3 (ESV) ³Send out your **light and your truth**; let them **lead** me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling!*

Timothy Keller made this great observation about light and truth

Let's say I'm riding along on my bicycle and there is a tree up there. There are a couple of ways to get information about the tree. One is I run into it, and that's a very fast way to know, but that's not the best way to get information. I would like information about the fact of the tree, the size of the tree, and the location and shape of the tree *before* I run into it, and the only way for me to get that.... helpful information, is light. It bounces off the tree. It hits my retina and tells me exactly where it is and exactly what it is.... Light gives you truth. ²

In the **Psalms** the metaphor of LIGHT is tied salvation — that the LIGHT of God brings salvation.

Psalm 27:1 (ESV) The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

² Keller, T. J. (2013). The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive. Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

They would sing of how the **light** of God's Word was necessary for living the redeemed life.

Psalm 56:13(ESV)** For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, **that I may walk before God in the light of life.

God delivers us from sin and its power and penalty so that we can walk with in the light of His presence in freedom. THAT is the light of God at work in practical ways.

Psalm 89:15 (KJV)** Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they **shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.

They would sing of how God's **light** shined on them to show them how to walk in the practicalities of life (finances, sexuality, employment, marriage, parenting, education).

They would sing of how the **light** of God's presence and Word exposes sin.

Psalm 90:8 (ESV)** You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins **in the light of your presence.

They would sing about how the **light** of God's presence would comfort His people in the dark moments of life

***Psalm 118:27 (ESV)** The Lord is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us.*

So, if you find yourself in a difficult place in life, either because of sins that you have committed — or sins that others have committed against you — or just by virtue of the fact that you're living in a broken world — God's light — His very presence — will still come and illuminate your situation.

It is like that moment after the grey wet days of winter when the sun comes out and shines on your face. You just close your eyes and you just enjoy that light that

brings warmth. It almost feels as if it's cleansing you and healing you. THAT is how their Scriptures spoke of God — HE comes and SHINES on us!

But they couldn't stop at the book of Psalms. When they heard Jesus say "I am the light of the world" their march through the Old Testament continued to the **Book of Ecclesiastes** where **light** is a metaphor for WISDOM

***Ecclesiastes 2:13-14 (ESV)** Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. ¹⁴The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in*

Wisdom is the proper application of knowledge. Wisdom is a form of light that God gives. Now this Jesus is saying that HE is **the light** of the world.

But the word **light** resounded even more into the books and the voices of the Old Testament prophets. In **Isaiah 9:2** the word **light** was tied to the Messiah.

***Isaiah 9:2 (ESV)** The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.*

***Isaiah 49:6 (NLT)** ⁶He says, "You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."*

The Gospel of Matthew — written to a Jewish audience — explains that Jesus is fulfillment of **Isaiah 9:2**.

***Matthew 4:13-15** And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴**so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:** ¹⁵ "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles ¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."*

In **Isaiah** the idea of **light** was tied to the Law of God and the Justice of God

***Isaiah 51:4 (ESV)** "Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my*

*nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set **my justice for a light** to the peoples.*

This is huge stuff. God refers to His law and His justice as LIGHT.

These were the things stirring in the hearts of these men and during the illumination of the Temple

Light is related to the presence of God — the commands of God — the teachings of God — the word of God.

This **light** provides salvation — life — and deliverance.

This **light** shows us how to walk — exposes our sin — exposes our own personal darkness.

This **light** shows us God — gives us God's wisdom.

This **light** shows us God's justice.

This **light** comes in the person of the Messiah.

All of that is bound up in the concept of light.

HUGE — All that the Old Testament had to say about LIGHT was a foreshadowing of the light of God coming in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus has already turned Jerusalem upside down on the Great Day of the Feast: As the high priest was pouring the out water drawn from the pool of Siloam as a powerful picture of God providing life giving water in the wilderness — Jesus shouts to the crowd saying that HE is the life-giving presence of God — He is the source of living water that springs up to eternal life.

And there's Jesus — **again!** The people have already been spiritually and emotionally stirred by the celebration of light through the feast.

QUOTE: William Barclay — *Jesus is saying: "You have seen the blaze of the Temple illuminations piercing the darkness of the night. I am the Light of the World, and, for the man who follows me there will be light, not only for one exciting night, but for all the pathway of his life. The light in the Temple is a brilliant light, but in the end it flickers and dies. I am the Light which lasts forever."*

REMEMBER **Isaiah 9** — 700 years before this moment in **John 8** God said that the Messiah will be a light, not just to the Jews, but to all all nations of the Earth. Jesus says, I AM THAT LIGHT!

And then He declares

John 8:12 ...Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

This is HUGE! How do you come into the light? How do you partake of the light? How do you benefit from being in the light? Jesus says it all comes down to this one issue. **FOLLOW ME.**

In our culture we have this notion that if someone "makes a decision" for Jesus — or cries — or raises their hand or comes forward — that somehow they have relationship with God. They may or may not. The litmus test is simple: **Do they follow Jesus?** It's not a matter of a momentary understanding, but it's a habitual life practice and pattern walking in the ways of Jesus!

QUOTE: A Handbook on the Gospel of John — *Whoever follows me must be understood in the sense of "whoever becomes my disciple." It is often expressed more clearly in some languages as "if anyone becomes my adherent" or "... joins himself with me."*³

Here's another way to frame it:

³ Newman, B. M., & Nida, E. A. (1993). *A handbook on the Gospel of John*. Helps for translators; UBS handbook series (264–265). New York: United Bible Societies.

Andreas Köstenberger — *Rather, light from Jesus that results in personal salvation always assumes a faith commitment to Jesus in John's Gospel.... For John, "believing" and "following" are virtual synonyms*⁴

John 8:12Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness

Colossians 1:13 (ESV) ¹³*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,*

John 8:12 but will have the light of life."

CHECK THIS OUT — We HAVE the light of life!

Jesus was saying that not only do we have light coming into us, but there is a sense in which we become shafts of the Lord's light. How beautiful and wondrous!⁵

Put that along side the description of the way Jesus described those who follow Him — embrace His as King.

Matthew 5:14 (ESV) ¹⁴*"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.*

JESUS IS EVERYTHING HIS PEOPLE!

He has already said that He is the bread of life — He is the life-giving presence of God — He is the light that produces life

Psalms 36:9 (ESV) ⁹*For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.*

Jesus sends us on mission into in our dark world to be shafts of His light — the light of life.

⁴ Köstenberger, A. J. (2004). John (pp. 253–254). Baker Academic.

⁵ Hughes, R. K. (1999). John: that you may believe (pp. 229–230). Crossway Books.

Things might be SO dark that we don't have a clue as to what we should say / or not say. Things might be SO dark that we don't have a clue as to what would be the right thing to do.

But here's the deal: We just need to be *following* Jesus — following His ways. And we will be “Jesus Rays” — shafts of light shining through dark clouds.

By the way — here's the end of the story concerning the theme of LIGHT. Last Book of the Bible — Second to the last chapter

*Revelation 21:23-25 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.** ²⁴By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.*

The light of the world is the lamb of God! How beautiful and wondrous!