

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

24. Following Jesus, Light of the World

John 8:12

This morning we're in our 24th installment of our study in the Gospel According to John. We're going to take another look at [John 8:12-30](#).

The section opens with Jesus making this stunning declaration

John 8:12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

We walked through the concept and the theology of this term *LIGHT* throughout the Old Testament.

Then we set the immediate context for that stunning declaration.

CONTEXT is so important for us in reading and studying the Bible. The backdrop for [John 8:12](#) was the Feast of Tabernacles. We learned that the Feast of Booths is one of the three major feasts in Judaism.

The Feast of Booths commemorated and celebrated the life-giving presence of YHWH during their ancestors' 40 years in the wilderness..

One of the epic moments of that feast was a ceremony that took place on the very first night of the Feast of Tabernacles. The ceremony was called *The Illumination of the Temple*. **William Barclay** describes the ceremony —

*It took place in the Court of the Women. The court was surrounded with deep galleries, erected to hold the spectators. In the centre four great candelabra were prepared. When the dark came the four great candelabra were lit and, it was said, **they sent such a blaze of light throughout Jerusalem** that every courtyard was lit up with their brilliance. Then all night long, until cock-crow the next morning, the greatest and the wisest and the holiest men in Israel danced before the Lord and sang psalms of joy and praise while the people watched.*

The almost unbearable brilliance of the light given off by those massive candelabras signified everything the Old Testament Scripture declared about

YHWH being light — His Word being light — and walking with YHWH in the light. But that brilliant light especially reminded them how YHWH **present** with their ancestors as a pillar of fire that **led them** as they came out of slavery in Egypt (Ex. 13:21–22); **protected them** from the pursuing army of Egypt (Ex. 14:19–25) and **remained** with them and **lead** them *throughout all their journeys* (Exodus 40:38) on their way to the land God had promised them.

With that ceremony fresh in their minds of the people — Jesus stood right in the vicinity of those massive candelabras and said

John 8:12 ...“I am the light of the world.

He declares that **HE** is — in and of Himself —

the LIGHT of the presence of God

the LIGHT of salvation

the LIGHT of life

the LIGHT shows us how and where to walk

the LIGHT that exposes our sin

the LIGHT that exposes our darkness

the LIGHT that shows us God

the LIGHT that gives us God’s wisdom

the LIGHT that shows us God’s justice.

Ya!! That’s stunning!!

But Jesus **didn’t stop** at **revealing** the truth about Himself. He moves from REVELATION to RELATIONSHIP

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

Last week we started to wade into those words.

HOW does someone walk in the light?

HOW does someone participate in light of life?

Jesus says it all comes down to this one issue. **WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME.**

In our culture we have this notion that if someone “makes a decision” for Jesus — or raises their hand or comes forward — that somehow they have relationship with God. They may or may not. According to Jesus the litmus test for faith is simple: **Does that person follow Him?** Saving faith is not a matter of a cognitive understanding — it’s a faith that is demonstrated in a habitual life practice of following Jesus Christ.

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.”¹

Andreas Köstenberger — For John, “believing” and “following” are virtual synonyms²

This morning we’re to go deeper into what it means to follow Jesus.

FIRST — Believing Jesus, following Jesus mean walking in the way of Jesus.

¹ 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.

² Köstenberger, A. J. (2004). *John* (pp. 253–254). Baker Academic.

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

Mark 8:34 (NLT) ³⁴Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, “If any of you wants to be **my follower**, you must **give up your own way**, take up your cross, and **follow me**.

John 10:27 (CSB) ²⁷My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they **follow me**.

BDAG (A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature)

- ① lit. **to move behind someone in the same direction**,
I will behave in accordance or in agreement with
- ② **to follow or accompany someone who takes the lead**
- ③ **to follow someone as a disciple, *be a disciple, follow***³

To follow Jesus / be a disciple of Jesus is to behave in accordance or in agreement with Jesus.

BIG QUESTIONS — Do we live in a way that clearly identifies our lives with Jesus? Do our lives say that His ways are our ways?

I cannot adequately express how this strikes at the very heart of the state of American Christianity.

Ray Ortlund — *If a church is not positively communicating the gospel both by what it says **and** by what it is, then that church risks unsaying by its reality what it is saying by its theory.*⁴

D. M. Lloyd Jones — *...as we live our ordinary lives, we are declaring all the time exactly what we are.*⁵

We can SAY we believe in Jesus, but are we walking in the way of Jesus? Are we walking in the way of the cross/sacrificial love? Are we walking in the way of Jesus

³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). In A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 36). University of Chicago Press.

⁴ Ray Ortlund. The Gospel Coalition Orlando 2015

⁵ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Studies in the Sermon on the Mount (p.99). Eerdmans Publishing Company

who esteemed others before Himself? Are we walking in His way by loving our enemies, blessing those who curse us, doing good to those who hate us, and praying for those who spitefully use us and persecute us (Matthew 5:44–45 NKJV)? Are following behind Jesus who said “Father, not my will, but your will be done”?

PLEASE DO NOT MISUNDERSTAND ME — Walking in the way of Jesus can never earn the love of Jesus / never earn salvation / never earn right standing with God (because we fail at all of it). Jesus makes it clear that following Him / walking in His ways is the evidence that we believe He is the Messiah, the Son of God who alone can save!

SECOND — (we touched on this last week) Jesus says that those who follow Him will **not only** *never walk in darkness* — He declares that they will **HAVE the light of life**. So much so that the one who IS the light of the world would say this about His followers

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

Those who believe Jesus is the Messiah carry HIS light into the world!

What an amazing thing to think about!

Check this out —

1 Thessalonians 1:5–6 (The Message) ⁵When the Message we preached came to you, it wasn’t just words. Something happened in you. The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions. **You paid careful attention to the way we lived among you, ⁶and determined to live that way yourselves.** In imitating us, **you imitated the Master.** Although great trouble accompanied the Word, you were able to take great joy from the Holy Spirit!—taking the trouble with the joy, the joy with the trouble.

1 Thessalonians 1:5–6 (CSB) ⁵because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full assurance. **You know how we lived among you for your benefit,**

Paul and his team followed the example of the sacrificial love of Jesus —

*⁶and you yourselves **became imitators of us and of the Lord** when, in spite of severe persecution, you welcomed the message with joy from the Holy Spirit.*

The Thessalonians saw that and they became imitators / followers of Jesus.

But let's drill down even deeper into this word FOLLOW

This word FOLLOW was FILLED with powerful and personal implications about a person's relationship to the Jesus, the light of the world!

1. To follow means to be under his authority and follow his command.

In Greek culture this word was used in speaking of a soldier following his captain. It's a military term that meant there was someone in authority over you who had the right to **command conduct** and **action** from you — you were accountable to them. The point is that Jesus is the general and you are a private. When He speaks and gives an order — you're supposed to do what he tells you to do. You're under authority. THAT runs against the grain of lost mankind and contemporary church culture. We live in an age that seeks to throw off all authority, including God's. Many professed followers of Jesus struggle with seeing Jesus as having authority over them. In modern church culture men and women love the concept of Jesus as friend — but they resist or reject Jesus as commander-in-chief.

2. To follow Jesus, light of the world, means to recognize and submit to the fact that you belong to Him.

The word was used to speak of a slave accompanying his master.

Fallen man takes the position stated in the famous poem, "Invictus" —

My head is bloody, but unbowed.... I am the master of my fate: ^[L]~~[SEP]~~ am the captain of my soul.

Scripture does not teach that.

Scripture says that everyone is a slave. You're either a slave to sin, Satan and death, or you're a slave to Jesus, grace and life.

The only question is: Who is your master? Who owns you? Who possesses you?

REMEMBER — The Gospel of John is presenting to us God Incarnate on Mission.

The One who in the beginning said "Let there be light" stepped into our darkness on a mission to redeem us.

Song "Here I Am to Worship"

Light of the world
You stepped down into darkness
... Humbly You came to the earth You created
All for love's sake became poor

He did that to redeem us — purchase us out our slavery to Satan, sin and death

***Revelation 5:9 (ESV)** ⁹And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,*

He did that can live as we were created to live — **under** God and **with** God and **by** God's grace. **THAT** is freedom.

1. To follow Jesus, light of the world, means to be under his authority and follow his command.
2. To follow Jesus, light of the world, means to recognize and submit to the fact that you belong to Him.
- 3. Following Jesus, the light of the world, means that you are following Him as teacher.**

The third use of this word was to refer to a person following the counsel of a wise teacher. Its use implies that we **need** instruction — we **need** direction — and because we believe Jesus we **follow** His directions.

Jesus says that if we *follow Him* we won't *WALK in darkness*.

Walk = to go here and there — Meandering. If we **follow Him** we won't walking in the dark with no purpose or direction.

Paul tells us (**1 Corinthians 1:24**) that Jesus is embodiment of all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge!

Following Jesus means that we are following Him as our teacher.

CHECK THIS OUT —

Isaiah 30:21 ²¹And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

I LOVE this verse! Here we see God **actively involved** leading His people. A freshly humbled people — a freshly repentant people — who will be listening. And they will hear God as if He's so close — as if He's right behind them saying: "Hey, turn right here."

THAT is what He will do when we're in His Word.

THAT is what He will do when His Word is treasured up in our hearts.

Elisabeth Elliot — Keep a Quiet Heart

In order to get to a place called Laity Lodge in Texas you have to drive into a riverbed. The road takes you down a steep, rocky hill into a canyon and straight into the water. There is a sign at the water's edge which says, "Yes. You drive in the river." One who has made up his mind to go to the uttermost with God will come to a place as unexpected and perhaps looking as impossible to travel as that riverbed looks. He may glance around for an alternative route, but if he wants what God promises His faithful ones, he must go straight into the

danger. There is no other way. The written word is our direction. Trust it. Obey it. Drive in the river and get to Laity Lodge. Moses said to Israel, "... love the Lord your God, obey him, and hold fast to him: that is life for you." When you take the risk of obedience, you find solid rock beneath you—and markers, evidence that someone has traveled this route before. "The Lord your God will cross over at your head. . . he will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not be discouraged or afraid" (Deuteronomy 31:3; 8 ESV).

QUESTION — Everyone is being taught by someone — Who are you following?

1. To follow Jesus, the light of the world, means to be under His authority and follow his command.
2. To follow Jesus, the light of the world, means to recognize and submit to the fact that you belong to Him.
3. Following Jesus, the light of the world, means that you are following Him as teacher.

4. To follow Jesus, the light of the world, means that we recognize Jesus as King.

This word **follow** was also used to speak of a citizen obeying the laws of their king and his kingdom. We need to guard against thinking of faith in Jesus as merely our ticket to heaven. We are saved by faith in Jesus Messiah. The light of the world is the Savior King of an everlasting Kingdom. He is the King on Cross. Because Jesus is the King on a Cross, His Kingdom and the citizens of His Kingdom are shaped by the cross. His agenda and His government reflect and expresses His character. His Kingdom reflects His ways and His values.

Those who follow Jesus, light of the world, are his faithful subjects. In that relationship we do what Jesus says because the King and His glory supersedes the subjects, the King's glory is more important than our own.

5. William Barclay states the last meaning with great clarity —

William Barclay — It is often used of following a teacher's line of argument.... The Christian is the man who has understood the meaning of the teaching of Christ. He has not listened in dull incomprehension or with slack inattention. He takes the message into his mind and understands, receives the words into his memory and remembers, and hides them in his heart and obeys.

THAT IS WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW JESUS. It means that we recognize the authority of Jesus as general — as master — as king — as teacher. If you are anything like me — there's something in you that is taken aback by that.

We look at those terms and we think — *That's a lot of authority, that's a lot of submission!*

That kind of authority assumes that if my heart takes issue with His leading that I'm always the one in the wrong!

That kind of authority totally undoes any churchy or romantic concept of claiming to follow Jesus!

BIG QUESTIONS — Do I really follow Jesus — *As king? As Lord? As God? As judge? As ruler? As commander? As teacher?*

I've always loved the U2 song *I Will Follow* — I especially love their live performance of that song in Boston when Bono changed the lyric of the third line in the third verse

*I was on the inside
When they pulled the four walls down
Amazing Grace
I was lost, I am found*

*Walk away, walk away
I walk away, walk away
I will follow
If you walk away, walk away
I walk away, walk away
I will follow*