

I Am the Light of the World [Slide 1] John 8:12-20

Read Jim Lovell story. When you're surrounded by darkness in a desperate situation, you welcome the appearance of light. Our family visited Carlsbad Cavern one summer. When we were in the depths of the cave our guide switched off all the lights so that we might experience complete darkness. The darkness felt heavy, like it was pressing in, a malignant enemy that threatened to harm us. My spirit soared when the lights came back on.

Jesus made the astounding claim that he is the light of the world. We are continuing in our sermon series on Jesus selfies, mental pictures Jesus provided of himself so that we might better understand him. Today's Jesus selfie is located in John 8:12-20. I invite you to turn to that passage. John is the fourth book in the New Testament. John 8:12-20.

As you're turning to the passage I'll explain the context. Jesus is speaking in the Temple in Jerusalem. According to John 7:2 Jesus has come to Jerusalem during the Feasts of booths or the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Feast of Booths or Tabernacles celebrated the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt and it celebrated the Fall harvest. It was called the Feast of Booths because Israelite families would construct simple lean-to's or shelters out of branches and palm fronds, usually placing them on the roof of their house, where they would live outside for a week, commemorating the time the Israelites lived outside in the wilderness until God led them into the Promised Land.

During their wilderness wandering God led the Israelites by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire by night. In order to commemorate the pillar of fire leading the Israelites the priests would light a golden candelabra in the Temple to represent the pillar of fire. Jesus' words thus reminded the people of the candelabra and the pillar of fire.

[Slide 2] This background helps us to understand the symbolism underlying verse 12. Verse 12 teaches us that those who follow Jesus will live in the truth. So, consider for a moment the pillar of fire. The Israelites were supposed to follow the pillar of fire if it moved and stop when it stopped. Jesus says that he who follows him will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. When he says that, Jesus is drawing on imagery of the Israelites following the pillar of fire. If they followed the pillar of fire they would be walking in the light and if they went in another direction they would soon be walking in darkness.

The light and darkness are symbols. Light represents God's truth, both his moral truth and his propositional truth. Darkness represents falsehood, both in terms of knowledge and in terms of morality. Light represents the path of obedience and loyalty to God. Darkness represents the path of disobedience and disloyalty to God.

We read this verse through Gentile eyes and we are apt to miss the significance to Jesus' claim to be the light of the world. In the wilderness wanderings, God only provided light to the Jews. The Egyptians did not benefit from the light. The Canaanites did not benefit from the light. The Edomites and Moabites and Ammonites did not benefit from the light. The only ones God provided with the light were the Jews.

When Jesus claimed to be the light of the world, every Jew would have clearly heard "the world". They might have expected Jesus to claim to be the light to the Jewish people, but they would not have expected Jesus to claim to be the light of the world. Those words would have jarred them. What do you mean, "Jesus is the light of the world?" We're so used to

appropriating Jesus for ourselves that we are oblivious to how stunning Jesus' words would have been to his original audience. He was claiming that God wanted to lead the nations, the Gentiles just like he led Israel in the wilderness. Jesus' words here apply to all people not just the Jews.

If anyone follows Jesus they will live in God's truth and anyone who does not follow Jesus will not live in God's truth. You understand spiritual truth as you follow Jesus.

A lot of people who look into Christianity from the outside think it doesn't make sense, it is foolish, you've got to be ignorant or simpleminded to believe that stuff. The reality is that you don't start understanding until you start walking after Jesus. The more we follow Jesus the more we understand, the more we walk in the light. It is the decision and commitment to follow Jesus that opens a person's mind to fully understanding spiritual truth.

Seeing is composed of two elements: the physical process of receiving images by your eyes and transmitting those impulses to your brain and the actual interpreting of those images by your brain. You don't really "see" until your brain interprets correctly the images it receives from the eyes. This is all analogous to how faith in Jesus enables us to perceive or understand spiritual truth.

Let me share with you the story of a person learning to see after they were blind because I am going to draw a spiritual analogy from this to our salvation. Read Michael May story. We see physically when our brain correctly interprets what the eye sees. We don't see when the brain does not correctly interpret what the eye sees. The Pharisees saw Jesus but their brains did not correctly interpret what they saw. They were spiritually blind.

The Bible says that we are born spiritually blind. Satan keeps us spiritually blind. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 that Satan keeps unbelievers in state of spiritual blindness. Read 2 Corinthians 4:3-4. This is why so many can read the Bible, can hear testimonies from Christians, yet remain totally unconvinced of the truth. God has to bring the light to people for them to even be able to grasp and accept who Jesus is. Read 2 Corinthians 4:5-6. When we respond in faith to the Gospel of Jesus and start to follow Jesus then we are filled with more and more light or understanding of God's truth. But just like the physically blind person who does not fully see from day one, so too we begin this journey of salvation where we progressively understand and accept more of God's truth.

Elsewhere Paul uses the analogy of babies and adults. When we first trust Christ we are spiritual babies, barely understanding anything. But as we learn and grow we press on to mature adulthood. Here is the key: obedience unlocks understanding. Following Jesus sheds light. The apostle James writes in James 1:21-24 that once we have received God's word we need to act on it. If we don't act in obedience on what we know then we deceive ourselves and we become like the person who looks in a mirror and walks away and forgets what kind of person they are. When we follow Jesus we live in the truth.

[Slide 3] In verses 13-20 we learn that Jesus reveals the truth because he is in partnership with God the Father. Look at verse 13. Read.

The Pharisees do not believe Jesus and they criticize him on the basis of a technicality. Rabbinical law held that a man's testimony in court on his own behalf was invalid. Not that it was necessarily false, but it was insufficient to establish truth because most of us tend to be biased speaking on our behalf. This conversation with Jesus is not exactly a court case, but they're holding him to this standard of evidence. They dismiss Jesus' testimony out of hand. I doubt they held this same standard when talking among themselves, but they demand it from Jesus.

According to Jesus' words they are walking in darkness and are spiritually blind because they choose not to follow Jesus.

Verse 14. Read. First, Jesus says that even if he is testifying about himself his testimony is true because he knows where he has come from and where he is going, but they don't know where he came from or where he is going. What does Jesus mean by that? If we think back to the picture of the pillar of fire leading the Israelites it is true that when you are walking in the light you can look back and see where you have come from and you can look forward and see where you are going. So, from a physical standpoint, if you have light you can look at where you came from and to where you are going, but Jesus is speaking in figurative language.

Where did Jesus come from? Heaven. Where is he going? Heaven. Jesus knows where he came from and where he is going, but they don't know. Continuing the analogy of the pillar of fire, if Jesus knows where he has come from and where he is going then he must be walking in the light. If they don't know where he has come from (and they don't) and they don't know where he is going, then they must not be walking in the light. Their inability to discern who Jesus is has already proved that they are walking in the darkness and not in the light.

Part of their problem according to Jesus is that they judge according to the flesh. Verse 15. Read. They judge on the basis of outward appearance and physical facts. They judge relying strictly on human wisdom and knowledge, and thus they fail to gain true spiritual wisdom.

Jesus says that he is not judging anyone. What he means is that his purpose in coming to the Earth at that time was not to judge people as to whether they were to be consigned to heaven or hell. In John 3:17 Jesus said, "Read." In the future he will judge, but that was not his mission at that time.

Verse 16. Read. Even if Jesus had come to judge, his judgment would be true because he judges in partnership with the Father. Jesus would not judge alone but together with the one who sent him, God the Father. The reason why Jesus is the light of the world, why he speaks the truth, why his judgments are always true is because he acts in partnership and harmony with God the Father. Therefore even their objection that they don't have to accept Jesus' self-testimony fails because the Father also testifies to Jesus.

Look at verses 17-18. Read. The OT law required two or more witnesses to confirm a fact. Jesus counts as one witness. God the Father counts as the second witness. You might ask the question: When did God the Father testify to Jesus?

First, the Father testified to the Son through the various miracles Jesus performed. These miracles were how God the Father authenticated Jesus as God the Son. In John 10:37-38 Jesus said, "Read." Jesus refers to the miracles he performed as works of the Father. In John 10:25 Jesus said, "Read." Jesus performed many miracles. Each one was an authenticating sign from the Father as to who Jesus is.

Second, the Father publicly affirmed Jesus as his Son at Jesus' baptism. Matthew 3:16-17 records the scene. Read. The apostle John wrote in his first letter to the churches in 1 John 5:9-10 the following: Read.

From God's perspective, man's problem is not with the quality of the evidence that Jesus is God's Son. From God's perspective, man's problem is that he doesn't know God at all and therefore does not receive the things of God. Look at verses 19-20. Read.

Don't overlook Jesus' claim to deity in verse 19. He says that if you really know Jesus then you would really know God the Father. How can that be true? How can knowing Jesus be the same thing as knowing God? It is true because Jesus is God. That is the only way it could be

true because no creature can represent God. Jesus is God. Therefore if you know Jesus, you know God.

John concludes by saying that even though Jesus spoke publicly and what he said was enough to get himself arrested, no one seized him because in God's sovereign plan it was not yet time for Jesus to be arrested. God was in control of these events, not man. Jesus will be arrested when God is ready for him to be arrested, but not until then.

So, what does it mean for you that Jesus is the Light of the World? It means that Jesus is the source of all truth, both spiritual truth and material truth. Jesus was the agent of creation, the one who actually did the creating. John 1:3 says, "Read." That means that every truth from math and physics to biology to the events of history all owe their existence to Jesus. As God the Son he is also the source of all truth about the spiritual realm. That is why Jesus says of himself that he is the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except by him.

[Slide 4] If you don't know Jesus or don't believe in him, you are living a lie. You are living as if he is not the central truth of all reality, when in fact he is. Your life is defective and incomplete because you have not given allegiance to the Light of the World. All of us to some extent face the same problem, even if we are believers, because our life journey is one of discarding all the falsehoods we have ever believed and learning to embrace the truth. At the moment of salvation you don't have your mind wiped clean and refilled with only God's truth. No, Paul says we have to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, a much slower process where we identify falsehood in our thinking and throw it out in order to replace it with God's truth.

God has given us his Word and his Spirit to aid us in that process. He holds us responsible for learning and living out the truths in the Bible.

[Slide 5] Jesus being the Light of the World also means that if you want to know what God is like, then take the time to learn what Jesus is like. Jesus said in verse 19 that if you know him, you will know the Father. Read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and ask God to reveal himself to you through his Son as described in those books. We start learning who God really is when we discard our preconceptions about what God should be like and we study what Jesus is really like. I get tired of hearing people say, "My God would never do that," or "God can't be like that," when they are basing what they say not on Scriptures but on their own preconceived notion of what God should be like. We all tend to make God in our own image. The only way to combat that deceiving tendency is to see how God has revealed himself in his Son and through his Word. Study Jesus if you want to know God.

[Slide 6] Finally, I mentioned this earlier in the sermon but it bears repeating: obedience usually precedes understanding. Don't wait until you fully understand and have all your questions answered before you obey God's word. Obey God's word and you will grow in your understanding. Jesus said in verse 12, he who follows me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life. Start following Jesus and you will gain light and understanding. That is how faith works. You obey before you fully understand, trusting that God will work things out according to his perfect will. God grant us the ability to live by faith. Let's pray.