

John: The Light of the World

John 8:12-30

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Turn with me to John 8. We are going to pass over for this week the story of the adulterous woman, the account we find in verses 1-11, there is an enormous textual problem with that story; but that's not the reason I'm passing over it tonight. I hope to include an illusion to that next week in the next passage. This evening I want us to look at the passage beginning at verse 12 and ending at verse 30. Hear then God's holy inerrant Word as we find it in verse 12 of John 8:

Again therefore Jesus spoke to them saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the Light of life." The Pharisees therefore said to Him, "You are bearing witness of yourself; Your witness is not true." Jesus answered and said to them, "Even is I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I came from or where I am going. "You people judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone. "But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone *in it*, but I and the Father who sent Me." Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true. "I am He who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me." And so they were saying to Him, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father, if you knew Me, you would know My Father also." These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him because His hour had not yet come. Then He said again to them, "I go away, and you shall seek Me, and shall die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come." Therefore the Jews were saying, "Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?" And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. "I said therefore to you that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *He*, you shall die in your sins." So they were saying to Him, "Who are You?" Jesus said to them, "What have I been saying to you *from* the beginning? "I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I

“speak to the world.” They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father. Jesus therefore said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. “And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.” As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him.

Let's pray together:

Our Father in heaven, we thank You for Your Word; and now we pray that by Your Spirit You would indeed bless it to us as we examine it together. For Jesus sake, Amen.

Jesus is at the Feast of Tabernacles, and the feast has just ended; and suddenly there is this voice that says, “I am the light of the world.” The Feast of Tabernacles was one of three occasions where Jews, no matter where they were—Judea, Galilee, in the Diaspora—would make their way to Jerusalem—Tabernacles, Pentecost, and Passover.

You remember, at a festival just like this, that Jesus, as a twelve-year-old boy in the throng in the crowds that filled Jerusalem, had been lost and His parents could not find Him. Jerusalem was filled with thousands of people. Perhaps, according to one New Testament scholar, the population of Jerusalem might even quadruple during one of these feasts. Tabernacles was a particularly joyful celebration; it was a family time. You can understand why. It lasted for a week. They would build on the roofs of their houses these ram-shackled tents made out of sticks and palm trees and so on, and they would sleep there. The children would go up there at night, they would eat different kinds of food, and they would have a sleep out on the roofs of their houses. It was a wonderfully joyful time; children would look forward to it immensely. It was a time of enormous celebration that looked back to the days of the Exodus. It talked about the in gathering of the crops; it was like harvest Thanksgiving; it was like camp at Twin Lakes. If the children wanted to come home, you only had to go upstairs and bring them down.

The festival had little reminders of the things that God had done in the past. We read in verse 20, where John gives us a little clue, and said, “These words He spoke in the treasury.” That is to say, the treasury of the temple. The temple was divided into several sections. When you first went to the temple mount, you’d walk into the court of the Gentiles. Gentiles were allowed into that outer precincts of the temple courtyard, but they could go no further. Then beyond that was the court of women. It was there, and I have no idea why, but it was in the court of women that the treasury was to be found. That is where the trumpet-like receptacles for offerings was to be found. It was where Jesus heard the tinkle of the coin, the widow’ mite, dropping into that brass, or whatever it was--that

trumpet-shaped receptacle in the court of women.

The court of women was open to the elements, for there was no roof in the courtyard, and at tabernacles candles would be lit on the floor. Perhaps hundreds or even thousands of candles would be lit and they would be lit for the whole week until tabernacles was over and then all of the candles would go out. If you came to Jerusalem and you were walking from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, four or five miles or so over the hills, and you are coming up to Jerusalem and the temple is on Mount Zion. At night, because it was open to the elements, you'd see the glow of light. You'd see the glow that emerged out of the temple; it must have been quite a sight. I'm sure some of the families might have gone for a little walk at night outside the city just to see the glow of light that was emerging from the temple. And that's the point. When the Feast of Tabernacles is finished, the lights have all gone out, and suddenly there's a voice saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life."

Didn't Jesus say the most extraordinary things at the most appropriate times? Just as He had done in chapter 7 of John's gospel when the priest had poured the water beside the altar on the seventh day of Tabernacles; they had taken water in those golden pitchers from the Pool of Siloam and walked through the streets, gone to the altar, walked round seven times, poured this water; and then suddenly, in the silence, Jesus says, "If any man thirsts, let Him come to Me and drink." Extraordinary! And Jesus is saying three things.

I. The human condition.

First of all, He is passing a comment upon the human condition. He is saying, by implication, what He thinks of the human condition; that apart from Himself the human condition is in abject darkness. Men and women are in darkness; their minds are darkened; they're blind and cannot see. By the way, the next story in John is about a blind man who is going to be healed. Do you see the connection? It is a recurring theme in John's gospel. Jesus has come to dispel the darkness. Actually, it is a theme that John plants right in the prologue of the gospel in the very introduction in the opening sentences. John plants the idea that Jesus is coming into the world as the light of the world to dispel the darkness.

What kind of darkness is Jesus talking about? What kind of darkness is John talking about as he records this incident? He may have in mind two kinds of darkness. There is the darkness that describes, relatively speaking, the old covenant. As they transition from the old covenant to the new covenant, what have all these feasts been—Tabernacles, Pentecost, Passover? They've been types, shadows, sketches, preparation. Maybe on your coffee table you have one of these coffee table books of one of the great masters—Leonardo DaVinci or Rembrandt or Titian. Sometimes in these books there are some of the sketches. I

have one of John Constable and there are four or five sketches of how he planned the painting before he actually painted it. There is the finished product that stands out and glows and has an aura about it and then there are all of these sketches—doodles—some of them. And the Old Testament, the Old Covenant—the Feast of Tabernacles—was like the sketch as opposed to the full drawing, the full painting. It was relative darkness as opposed to the light.

Actually, John has been telling us that from the very beginning right in the prologue. Do you remember what John says? “The Law came by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ,” and, “of His fullness we have all received one blessing after another.” John isn't saying that there wasn't any grace or there wasn't any truth in the Old Testament. He's not saying that. But he is saying that in comparison it's like darkness and light. There is the preparation and there is the fullness, there is relative darkness and there is light, and Jesus is perhaps saying at the end of this Feast of Tabernacles, “If you put your trust in Me, you'll never need to celebrate this feast ever again because it is coming to an end. The temple is going to be torn down; the veil of the temple is going to be rent into from the bottom all the way up to the top. I am the light of the world.”

But perhaps more importantly, Jesus is speaking of darkness in another way—a more personal way, in a more experiential way. There is a darkness that lies in the human heart; there is the darkness of the natural man's mind. Do you remember in chapter 3, when Jesus encounters Nicodemus, when He says, “Unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” And do you remember what Nicodemus says to Jesus? It's a funny thing; you've got to smile. Nicodemus says to Jesus, “I don't understand what You're talking about.” Jesus says, “Unless you come into the kingdom, you can't understand,” and Nicodemus is saying, “I don't understand what You're saying.” “Unless a man is born from above, you cannot see the kingdom of God,” and Nicodemus is saying, “I don't understand a word of what You're saying.” And every word that comes out of Nicodemus' mouth confirms what Jesus is saying; that the natural man is in darkness. And here is Jesus now, at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, when all the lights of the candles have gone out; and there's this booming voice, at least I like to think that Jesus had a booming voice, saying, “I am the light of the world. I am the light of the world.” And He says, “If you believe in Me, you'll walk out of the darkness into the sunshine of new life and glory and inheritance.”

I wonder if it has ever fully dawned on you that you are in darkness without Jesus?

II. What Jesus does for man's condition.

But secondly, let's look at this statement that Jesus makes. Not only does He say something about the human condition, but He tells us something about His own person, by way of the self revelation that He now gives when He says, “I am the

light of the world.” What does Jesus mean? For John, *light* is a buzz word. Like *life*, and *true*, and *fullness*; those were buzz words for John. John loved those words. Do you remember in the first chapter, and it's so important in order to understand the rest of the gospel of John, in the prologue, how John is contrasting John the Baptist and Jesus, and he's saying, John was a light but he wasn't the true light. The true light is Jesus and Jesus is the one who lightens every man who comes into the world. It's an extraordinary statement that John makes in the prologue about Jesus. He lightens every man who comes into the world.

What's Jesus saying, when He says, “I am the light of the world?” He's saying, first of all, that He's fulfilling prophecy. Let's start there. He's actually fulfilling prophecy. We read during Christmas from Isaiah 9, “The people who dwelt in darkness have seen a great light. Upon them has the light shined.” And Jesus is saying, “I am that light; I am the One of whom the Old Testament speaks; I am the One about which the Old Testament prophecies; I am the fulfillment of every promise of the Messiah in the Old Testament; I am He.” It's one of the great claims of Jesus that He fulfills the promises, the prophecies of the Old Testament, that they find their fulfillment in Him. He is the light.

But He is saying perhaps more than that, because He's saying that the world is in darkness; the natural man is in darkness. Look at verse 13. The Pharisees are incensed and said to Him, “You are bearing witness about yourself. Your testimony is not true.” They understood that He was claiming to be the One who led the people of God out of the Exodus into the wilderness and into the promised land. That's what He's claiming to be. You know, part of what the Feast of Tabernacles was about was the Exodus period when a pillar of light led the people through the wilderness and Jesus is now saying, “I am that light.” I'm the one who leads the people of God into the ways of salvation and into the ways of truth and into the ways of fullness. For those who are in darkness, He is the One who deals with that darkness.

And do you know how He deals with that darkness that is in the human soul? Do you remember how the gospels will speak of Calvary? When they will nail Him to the tree? And there comes a moment in the experience of Jesus when He is lifted up from the earth onto that cross and there is darkness for three hours. In the middle of the day Jerusalem was dark. And what was happening? Jesus was taking upon Himself the darkness of the human condition. As our sin and the guilt of our transgressions were imputed to Jesus He cries out in the midst of the darkness, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”

And the answer that He did not hear was because He had entered into the darkness of the human condition and He'd become our substitute so that you and I by faith in Him, can walk out into the sunshine of life eternal. “Well might the Son in darkness hide and shut its glories in,” Wesley said. Until He cried, “It is finished.” And on that glorious resurrection morning from the darkness of that

tomb, He walked out! He walked out into the sunshine of that garden as a resurrected individual. You remember that we sang it in the hymn just before the sermon? It is a beautiful allusion to it in the last verse of that hymn we just sang about the Book of Revelation and it says that the city of God has no need of light or of the sun or the moon or the stars because Jesus is that light. It is a picture of course. He is the light; He is the only light that we need. But he is saying more than that too when He says, "I am the light of the world" because He is making a claim to absolute Deity.

You understand that? God is what? John, when he writes his first epistle says, "God is light." Jesus is the radiance, the effulgence of the *glory* of God says Hebrews in the first chapter. "I am the light of the world; I am the effulgence of the glory of God," Jesus is saying. The Pharisees complained. You know talk is cheap, they said. Who are you to be saying these things. And Jesus goes back to their law and basically, what He is saying is, "What I am saying is true because I am an expert witness about Carmarthen. And you say, "What?" It's the village where I was born and the place where I was raised. I lived there for 20 years, and I guarantee I know more about Carmarthen than any of you, because I've been there. I can tell you what it looks like, I can tell you the good things, and I can tell you some of the bad things, and I won't do any of them. I'm an expert witness on that.

Do you know what Jesus is saying here? It's quite astonishing. He's saying, "I am an expert witness about heaven. I'm an expert witness about God. I'm an expert witness about the Father, because that's My home. That's where I live. I can tell you what it's like. I can give you the details, because I'm an eyewitness of it. It's breathtaking." Not only is He an expert witness, but He says there's another witness that backs Him up. What He's doing is invoking Old Testament law that, "By the mouth of two witnesses something will be regarded as valid." And He says, "The Father testifies of Me. And He testifies of Me through what John the Baptist said, He testifies of Me through the miracles that I do, He testifies of Me through the Old Testament Scripture that I'm fulfilling." And since we have these two expert witnesses, that both agree, My claim is valid. I am the light of the world, I am the effulgence of the glory of God.

Now I want you to think about that for a minute. The good news, and it's so astonishing, that in a miserable, darkened world, that there's a light shining, a brilliant, brilliant light. Do you remember that moment when Gandalf the Gray takes off his cloak and it's Gandalf the White, and everybody steps back. Well, multiply that by infinity. Do you remember in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, when Pilgrim sets out from the City of Destruction, and meets Evangelist. Evangelist gives him a scroll and on it is written the phrase, "Flee from the wrath to come." Christian reads it and he says to Evangelist, "Where is there to flee to?" And Evangelist says, "Do you see yonder wicket gate?" And Pilgrim says, "No, I don't see it. Where is it?" Evangelist says, "Do you see yonder lamp?" "Yes, I think I can see the light." "Well, walk towards it. Go towards the light."

There is a man who was perishing and he sees a faint glimmer of a light that is shining, and Jesus is saying, "I am the light of the world. And if you believe in Me you will never walk in darkness." Do you remember how Wesley put it? "Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night. Thine eye diffused a quickening ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light. My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee." Have you known that? Is that your testimony? Can you say that? That you've seen the light that shines in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and you've walked towards that light and you've embraced that light and He's brought you out of the darkness of your human condition, to walk in the marvelous light and liberty of the gospel.

III. Unless you believe in Jesus you will die in your sins.

He's describing the wonders and the joy of the way of salvation. Jesus says some very stark things in the close of this passage. He says to the Jews, and the Pharisees especially, "You will die in your sins." You will die, that is to say, under the judgment of God. Unless your sins are covered, unless your sins are dealt with, unless propitiation is made, unless a redemption price has been paid, you will die in your sins. You will die under the judgment of God. Unless you believe in Jesus. Unless you put your trust in Him.

Isn't that an astonishing, astonishing statement to make? Darkness is a terrible thing. I remember once visiting these caves in northern Ireland. They were underground. You had to get in a boat and go along this little stream, through the caves, around corners, and it went for about a mile or so. Stalagmites and stalactites. The guide did this little experiment. On the walls there were electric lights, bulbs, and when everyone was gathered in a safe place, there was a trickling stream beside us, he said, "I want you to stand perfectly still." And as we stood perfectly still, the lights went out. There is no darkness like that. There was no ambient light whatsoever. It was pitch black. You couldn't see a thing. That's the human condition. And Jesus is saying, "I am the light of the world. And if you believe in Me, you will never, never walk in darkness anymore, and you need never experience the eternity of darkness." Yes, the eternity of darkness that awaits those who don't trust in Him. Jesus comes when all the other lights are extinguished. What this passage is saying to us is, trust in that light, the light that shines in the person and work of Jesus. Let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, as we bow in Your presence just now, we thank You for the light that shines in the midst of darkness. We thank You for our blessed Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and again we pray have mercy on those who are with us who are still in darkness. We pray that You would draw them to the light of Christ. For Jesus' sake we ask it, Amen.

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