

July 10, 2022

“I Am the Light of the World”

John 8:12

FCF: The terrifying reality of darkness

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus has come as the Light of the world
(magnet) We must look to Him.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

How do you get through a night that lasts 66 days? That’s a reality for folks who live in parts of northern Alaska during the winter. How do they cope? One resident notes (**READ**):

It’s difficult to easily explain, but not having sunlight during the daytime creates a unique set of challenges one might never realize unless they experienced it for themselves. Wearing a wristwatch is a must. Turning every single light in the office and home on during the daytime and turning 99 percent of them off in the early evening is helpful for keeping a natural rhythm established.

Life in this world can be like a 66 day long night at times. Because it really is dark. All around us are signs of disease, emptiness, brokenness, poverty, injustice, and racism. With that come competing and erroneous worldviews, philosophies, and ideals. This world can be dark.

We’re continuing this morning in our summer sermon series covering the different “I am” statements that Jesus makes as recorded for us in John’s Gospel. And it is good news indeed.

SCRIPTURE READING: [John 8:12-20](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

With the hope of pushing back the heat, let’s consider Christmas for a moment. One of my childhood memories is that of the luminaries on Christmas Eve in our neighborhood. Up and down each street you could see paper bags filled with sand and a candle inside. On the straight stretches, as we drove along in the car, it was like you were a plane coming in for a landing. In fact, drivers could turn off their headlights and navigate by these little candles as they lit the way. It’s something like that in John’s Gospel – images of a deep darkness and a greater light.

Darkness is a universal image - especially in the historical context of a pre-electric age when the darkness of night was just that. People knew that darkness keeps some bad company. It means the absence of light and the opportunity to hide - not just from evil but so as to carry it out. That’s universal. In the Bible, darkness stands for ignorance, folly, falsehood, the loss or lack of truth, the tyranny of sin, a spiritual force within a cosmic battle against God’s kingdom.

And into all that comes this pronouncement by Jesus - one that does not go unchallenged. He says that He has come as the Light of the world. Our response? We must look to Him.

What would that mean? What would it mean to look to Him? Let’s consider this in three ways. First, the shocking claim. Second, the stunning promise. And, third, the simple condition.

I. THE SHOCKING CLAIM

First, the shocking claim (**READ John 8:12a**). This was astonishing at several levels.

A) *To Deity*

For starters, as we’ve seen already with other “I am” statements, there’s a claim to deity.

1. Common images of light

We know light reveals what's there, that it guides the way, and promises warmth against the cold.

2. Particular to the context

But there's more to it. If you read the context of John 7-8, you know this is the last day of the feast of Booths or Tabernacles. It was celebrated in the early fall each year in Jerusalem and involved living in temporary shelters to mark the Lord's faithfulness in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. Part of the celebration involved the lighting of torches that lit up the whole city. It was a spectacular sight and was meant to harken back to God's presence with His people through the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. Do you see? It's in that context that Jesus stands up and says "I am that light. I am the presence of God then who is with you now."

B) Of Inclusivity

So deity is the first shocking claim. But then there is a second, a claim of inclusivity.

1. Not "of Israel"

Note Jesus does not say He is merely the light of Israel. This light does start with Israel but was not meant to stop with them. Tragically, they had long since lost sight of their larger mission.

2. But "of the world"

Jesus says that He is the light of the world - not one nation or people but all nations and peoples.

([READ Isaiah 42:1, 5-6](#)) This is a broad inclusive mission in which no one was to be left out.

These claims of deity and inclusivity were shocking. And brought great resistance.

Application:

Are we offended by this? If not, we may not be hearing what Jesus is saying. How does His inclusivity offend? He celebrates the wrong kind of people. He refuses to be indebted by the self-righteous moralism of the religious. "Your works are rags." Grace is the only hope for all.

And that's offensive. But so too is His exclusivity. Note Jesus does not say He is a light but that He is the light of the world. He's the sun. All other religious leaders are, at best, light-reflecting crater-pocked moons. That sort of exclusive claim is offensive to us as well. So, are you offended by what Jesus is saying? That could be good. It could be you are hearing Him.

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II. THE STUNNING PROMISE

Now with this shocking claim also comes a stunning promise ([READ John 8:12](#)).

A) Of Freedom

Think of what Jesus is promising here to us. He is offering freedom. What kind?

1. From spiritual darkness

Freedom from spiritual darkness, from ignorance, folly, falsehood, lies, and the tyranny of sin.

2. Captured with a miracle

All of which is pictured and captured by a miracle. These "I am" statements of Jesus are often paired with a sign from Jesus, in this case the healing of a blind man ([READ John 9:1-7](#)). This is

a demonstration and proof that with the coming of Jesus, the light of the world, we need no longer walk in darkness. We can have the light of life. Which brings us to the second thing.

B) Of Flourishing

He promises not just freedom but flourishing. Let's think about light and life.

1. Light

The creation of light was God's first creative act. By it, comes all life in one way or another.

2. Life

But the life Jesus refers to is more than a beating heart or breathing lungs. He means eternal life - everlasting and ever-deepening. Life as it was meant to be. As Augustine said ([READ](#)), "Lord, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you."

Again, this is a stunning promise. Jesus is saying that He has come to give us life.

Illustration:

Perhaps this is borne out all the more in the absence of such life, as it fades and recedes. Think of Charles Darwin, the father of evolutionary theory. He turned his back on God and committed himself to secular humanism. His biography reveals that in so doing he lost his taste for life. As Darwin grew older, he admitted that he could no longer get anything out of poetry, music, or art. Life lost its flavor, and he lived out his days in a world without wonder or joy.

Application:

Turning to Jesus does not rob life of life. It brings it. "But what about those Christians who have no love of life? Look what their faith did for them." I hear you. But the problem is not that they've taken their faith too far. The problem is that they haven't taken it far enough.

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III. THE SIMPLE CONDITION

Which then brings us to this - a simple condition. "Assuming this is true, how is it possible? How can the light of life come into my life?" Jesus speaks to this ([READ John 8:12](#)).

A) The Call to Discipleship

1. Definition

This is the call to discipleship, given repeatedly by Jesus. What is a disciple? It is one who has heard the call of Jesus and responded by repenting, believing the gospel, and following Him.

2. Ongoing nature

And this call is ongoing. It is how we begin with Jesus. But it also how we continue each day.

B) The Necessity of Following

A key part stressed here is the necessity of following. What does this mean?

1. Definition

The *Cambridge English Dictionary* definition says it means ([READ](#)), "to move behind someone or something and go where he, she, or it goes." Now that's a very interesting way to put this.

2. The particulars

Let's break it down. To move behind - to humble ourselves and submit to another's authority. To go where they go - to let them set the agenda, the course of and our understanding of life.

This is the condition for the light of life to come into our lives. We are to follow Jesus.

Illustration:

What does that look like? This is how it played out for Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon was a famous Baptist preacher in 19th century London. When he was a young man in the 1850's he would go to church, but on one very snowy day he had to go to a little church around the corner. He went in and sat down. Just he and one other person were sitting in the sanctuary. The preacher got up. The minister couldn't get there, so it fell to this elder who had never preached. So it was just these three men. The elder got up, opened the Bible, read his text from Isaiah, "Look unto me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth..." And he just kept repeating it.

Finally he closed the Bible, looked to his two person congregation and said (READ):

Look to me and be saved. Don't you see? You don't have to do anything. You don't have to walk anywhere. You don't have to take even one step. Look. All you can do is look. You have to see you can't do anything. You have to see you can't walk anywhere. You just have to look. You have to see what he's done for you. You just have to look.

After this went on for about 15 minutes, the man looked at Spurgeon and said (READ), "Young man, I see you are miserable and you're going to stay miserable until you obey my text." What he couldn't have known was that Spurgeon had been really asking, "How do I get to know spiritual reality?" and had been doing everything he could think of. He had tried moralism. He had tried mysticism. He had tried spiritual practices. And none of it was getting him anywhere.

"Obey my text." And it dawned on him. (READ) "Jesus Christ is the light, because the only way I can be saved is to look. There's nothing I can do. I have to accept what he's done."

Application:

That's what it is to follow Jesus. We look to Him. We look to Him. We're all looking to something - leaning on, trusting in, turning to, counting on something. We're all religious. We're all people of faith in one way or the other. And Jesus says, "If you want life, look to me."

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CONCLUSION:

Why isn't this better news? We are told that, with Jesus, light has come into the darkness. One would think this would result in an explosion of joyful relief, expectation, and engagement. Why the tepid response - all around us and often within us? We don't appreciate Jesus as the light of the world because we downplay its darkness. But it is dark, more so than we know.

Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy is full of moments that point to this, but one that stands out is the moment in *The Two Towers* when the tide turns in the Battle of Helm's Deep. It has been a long, bloody night, and the orc armies of Saruman have penetrated

all lines of defense. With nowhere to go and seemingly endless enemy forces on their way inside, our heroes have little hope of survival. But just at this moment - perhaps the darkest point in the whole trilogy - Gimli says, “The sun is rising,” and we remember Gandalf’s promised return ([READ](#)), “Look to my coming at first light, on the fifth day. At dawn, look to the east.” The promise comes true. Gandalf-the-White appears on his white horse Shadowfax, behind him the Rohirrim remnant and the rising sun. Together, they charge down the mountain into the fray, bringing hope and light to the weary people walled up in deep darkness. It is a eucatastrophe.

It is what we see in the great true tale of Jesus’s coming into this world, light come into the darkness. How do we come to feel joyful relief, expectation, and engagement at the news of His coming? Take this image of the Battle of Helm’s Deep nearly lost and transpose it onto your view of this world. That’s where we are. Things are that dark, that far gone, that distressing. The lines have been penetrated, the defenses breached. And now hear the trumpet from within the walls as the sun rises over the mountains and you see the Savior coming in all His great light.

Jesus has come as the Light of the world. We must look to Him. Are you?

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