



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES: JOHN (GOSPEL OF TRUTH)

LESSON: ON HAVING THE LIGHT OF LIFE

JOHN 8:12-20

MAY 2, 2021

MAIN POINT

Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

JOHN CONTEXT

Perhaps it is helpful to point out that we are skipping John 7:53-8:11 in our Sunday school curriculum. In fact, many of your Bible's might have a footnote or parenthetical mark explaining that John 7:53-8:11 is a disputed passage for its authenticity. We won't get into the reasons in this section of the lesson, but I have included in the commentary section a brief excerpt from an article by John Piper for reasons why scholars doubt its authenticity.

Despite that we are skipping over John 7:53-8:11, John 8:12-20 still fits nicely into the context of the end of John 7. In the chapter, Jesus is in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles or otherwise called, the Feast of Booths. On the final day of the feast, Jesus stood up and declared, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" (7:37-38). Jesus' use of the water analogy is a fitting one because the Feast of Tabernacles celebrated in part the event of Moses striking the rock and water coming forth. Similarly, Jesus in John 8:12 will refer to himself as the light of the world. So too, as Jews lived in booths or tents surrounding Jerusalem, they would make lanterns and affix them around the booth. The Israelites performed this ceremony to remind them of God's total provision, including His leading them by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The lanterns on the tents remind them of this "light" provided by God. (You can read more about the Feast of Tabernacles in Exodus 23:14-17; Exodus 34:21-23; Leviticus 23:33-34; Numbers 29:12-40 and Deuteronomy 16:13-17.)

One last thing to mention about context.

In the Gospel of John, scholars often point out that John wrote with the number seven in mind. John includes seven miraculous signs and he also includes seven "I am" statements. In our passage today, Jesus gives us his second "I am" statement.

When Jesus refers to Himself with an "I am" statement, He is telling the people He Himself is God incarnate. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." He is claiming to be God.

For a quick review, here is a list of the seven signs and seven "I am" statements in the Gospel of John.

7 miraculous signs

1. Turning water into wine (2:1-12)
2. Healing the official's son (4:46-54)
3. Healing the lame man (5:1-18)
4. Feeding the 5,000 (6:1-15)
5. Calming the storm (6:16-21)
6. Giving sight to the blind man (9:1-41)
7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44)

7 "I am" statements

1. I am the Bread of Life (6:35)
2. I am the Light of the World (8:12)
3. I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)
4. I am the door (10:9)
5. I am the good shepherd (10:11)
6. I am the way the truth and the life (14:6)
7. I am the vine (15:1)

INTRODUCTION

In our passage today, Jesus makes the bold claim of being "the light of the world." Light and darkness is a commonly used metaphor to contrast a variety of things.

When you hear light and darkness used as a metaphor what do you think it means? Or what are some different ways the metaphor is used?

EXPLANATION // ...believe Jesus is the Christ...

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 8:12

Before the Jews, Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” What did Jesus mean by this?

Jesus’ statement is typically interpreted in either three ways.

- One way is to view *light as being good* and *darkness as evil*. Light in this instance would refer to goodness, purity, and righteousness – all fitting characteristics of Jesus.
- A second way is to view *light as knowledge* and *darkness represents ignorance, confusion, and foolishness*. In this interpretation, light represents a clear path, knowledge, or an enlightened understanding.
- A third way is to view *light as life*. In this instance *darkness represents death*. One might think about a cold, still, dark death. Light is a vibrant, radiant life. Perhaps think of a shining countenance, bright eyes, or full of life.

Picking among the three is not easy. In fact, all three ideas are present in the context of John 8. Notice these verses within the chapter:

- Jn. 8:12 – ...Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the *light of life*. (life vs. death)
- Jn. 8:21 - I am going away and you will seek me, and you will *die* in your *sin*. (life vs. death)
- 8:24 – I told you that you would *die* in your *sins*, for unless you believe that I am he you will *die* in your *sins*. (life vs. death)
- 8:28 – So Jesus said to them “when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will *know* that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. (truth vs. ignorance)
- 8:31 – If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you *will know the truth*, and the *truth* will set you free. (truth vs. ignorance)
- 8:34-35 – Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who *commits sin is a slave to sin*. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (good vs. bad)

Given these verses, it is most likely that we are to see all three elements in John 8:12. Thus, Jesus is good, truth, and life. So, we conclude that when Jesus said he was the light of the world, he was saying that he gives goodness, truth, and life.

Looking at other aspects of Jesus' statement will also be helpful. Notice that Jesus says, "I am *the* light of the world." Jesus does not say he is just *a* light, but he is *the* light. The pronoun *the* conveys Jesus is the only one who deserves this title. He, and he alone, is the light of the world.

Still further, notice that Jesus said, "I am the light of the *world*." For all people of every nation and tongue, Jesus is the light. He is the only good one in the world. He is the only one that speaks perfect truth. He is the only one that gives life. His capacity to give life, righteousness, and truth is not limited to a certain race of people, but it extends to the entire world.

Among goodness, truth, and life, do you think we need one more than the others or do you think we need all equally?

Do you think you can have one without the others? In other words, can you have life without righteousness or truth? Or could you have righteousness without truth?

Do you believe that Jesus is *the only* light of the world?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 8:12B-20

But Jesus did not just tell the Jewish crowd about himself without telling them the practical implications. Since he is the light of the world, Jesus adds, "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." In these words, Jesus extends an invitation to follow him. And for the person who follows Jesus, that person will no longer walk in darkness. They will receive Jesus as the light – as the one who gives goodness, truth, and life. For the person who follows Jesus, they receive life eternal, account credited as righteous, and a true knowledge of Jesus.

For many in the Jewish crowd, they did not understand or appreciate Jesus' words. Some Pharisees in particular questioned Jesus. In essence they questioned Jesus on why they should

believe him. Understandably, Jesus was making a bold claim about himself, but what proof did he have? Their specific question was phrased as an argumentative attack. They said, “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.” Thus, the Pharisees reasoned, “Anybody can make a bold claim about themselves. Just because someone says something about themselves does not mean it is true. At the very least, you will need another witness.”

But providing another eyewitness of Jesus is tricky. The reason is because Jesus is eternal, life giving, purely good, and perfectly true. He is *the* light of the world. The trouble with producing a witness for Jesus is that no one else is eternal, life giving, purely good, and perfectly true. Who could serve as a witness that Jesus gave life to the first-person Adam when no one was there? Who could serve as an eyewitness to Jesus sitting on his heavenly throne? Who else has lived eternally to say that Jesus has always existed? Who is not tainted by the effects of sin, so that even if someone could witness Jesus in these ways, would also be proven as a reliable witness? The answer to all these questions is: no one. Ironically, the Pharisee’s argumentative question makes perfect sense in light of exactly who Jesus is.

So Jesus could answer, “Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge according to the flesh...” Because all men, including these Pharisees, are not from above there is no one that can say they have witnessed Jesus when he sat upon his throne in heaven. Sinful earthly flesh cannot witness such a perfect, sinless heavenly Son of God.

But Jesus does have a witness, though not human, who can testify on his behalf. His witness, Jesus says, is his heavenly Father who performs miracles through him on this earth. It would be one thing for Jesus to claim that he was the light of the world and not do miracles. Without the miracles, one might easily conclude that Jesus was just a crazy person who had lost his mind and made outlandish claims. But Jesus did not just make outlandish claims; he backed up those claims with his miraculous signs and wonders. Thus, Jesus said, “In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.”

For us, in hearing Jesus speak about his Father, we know instantly that he is referring to his heavenly Father, that is, God the Father. But the Pharisees did not know what Jesus meant by calling God his Father. Perhaps, as with other Jews, they wondered about Mary and Joseph. (Jn. 6:42) So they asked him plainly, “Where is your Father?”

And Jesus responded, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”

Jesus spoke these words in the temple treasury, but not one arrested him because his hour had not come.

APPLICATION // ...have life in His name.

Do you think it is possible to receive Jesus as the light of the world and then not let your light shine before others? Why or why not?

When you share your faith, do you present Christ as *the* light of the world? On a scale from 1-10, how clear are you that Jesus is the only way?

Do you think a person can be saved without understanding that Jesus is the only way?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God to press this truth that was studied.

COMMENTARY / RESOURCES

Put Resources that could benefit the teacher: videos, podcasts, sermons, etc.

VERSE BY VERSE COMMENTARY

8:15. "I judge no one." The sense of Jesus' statement might seem confusing. In John 5:19-29, Jesus had a similar discussion with the Jews as he does in John 8:12-20. In John 5:22, Jesus said, "all judgment has been given to the son." How do we reconcile Jesus' earlier statement in John 5 with his statement in John 8 to judge no one?

Likely, Jesus is saying he judges no one *in the way that the Pharisees are judging him*. The Pharisees, Jesus critiqued, judge "according to the flesh." But Jesus does not judge by the flesh. He judges as the eternal Son of God. He is fit to judge since he is from above and where he is

going. And his judgment will take place once he has arrived at where he is going. But until then, he came to save the world, not to condemn it (cf. Jn. 3:17).

8:20. “His hour had not yet come.” Jesus has referred to an “hour” on a few occasions (2:4; 5:25; and 7:6). Particularly relevant to understanding Jesus’ reference in John 8:20 is his usage of an hour in John 7:6. In John 7, Jesus gives reason why he will not initially go to the Feast of the Tabernacles. John 7:1 explains there were “Jews seeking to kill him.” When his brothers pressured him to go, Jesus responds, “My time has not yet come...” So too, it seems in John 8:20 that the Pharisees had intentions of arresting Jesus, yet the reason given for why they were not able to arrest him is because “his hour had not come.” It seems John clues readers to the idea that God and/or Jesus is in control of the time when Jesus’ hour will fully come, that is, the time when he will ascend to the cross and pay for sins.

COMMENTARY FOR SUPPORT SCRIPTURE SECTION

Excerpt from “Neither Do I Condemn You” article by John Piper
(<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/neither-do-i-condemn-you--3>)

This message is the kind I may give once every decade or so. The reason it’s so rare is that the situation with our text is so rare. In most of your Bibles, you notice that [John 7:53–8:11] is either set off in brackets or is in a footnote. The reason for this is that most New Testament scholars do not think it was part of the Gospel of John when it was first written, but was added centuries later. For example,

- Don Carson, who teaches at Trinity, and is in my view one of the best New Testament scholars in the world, writes, “Despite the best efforts . . . to prove that this narrative was originally part of John’s Gospel, the evidence is against [them], and modern English versions are right to rule it off from the rest of the text (NIV) or to relegate it to a footnote (RSV).” (*The Gospel According to John*, 333)
- Bruce Metzger, one of the world’s great authorities on the text of the New Testament until his death in 2002: “The evidence for the non-Johannine origin of the pericope of the adulteress is overwhelming.” (*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 219)
- Leon Morris: “The textual evidence makes it impossible to hold that this section is an authentic part of the Gospel.” (*The Gospel According to John*, 882)
- Andreas Köstenberger: “This represents overwhelming evidence that the section is non-Johannine.” (*John*, 246)

- And Herman Ridderbos: The evidences “point to an unstable tradition that was not originally part of an ecclesiastically accepted text.” (*The Gospel of John*, 286)

I think they are right. And this gives us a chance to spend a little while on the branch of biblical studies behind these judgments called textual criticism and its implications for the trustworthiness and authority of the Scriptures. So, let me summarize the reasons these scholars give for thinking this story of the woman taken in adultery was not originally part of John’s Gospel, and then give some general thoughts about the science of textual criticism that helps make sense of the arguments.

Why This Section Isn’t Original to John’s Gospel

The evidence goes something like this:

1. The story is missing from all the Greek manuscripts of John before the fifth century.
2. All the earliest church fathers omit this passage in commenting on John and pass directly from [John 7:52](#) to [John 8:12](#).
3. In fact, the text flows very nicely from 7:52 to 8:12 if you leave out the story and just read the passage as though the story were not there.
4. No Eastern church father cites the passage before the tenth century when dealing with this Gospel.
5. When the story starts to appear in manuscript copies of the Gospel of John, it shows up in three different places other than here (after [John 7:36](#); [7:44](#); [21:25](#)), and in one manuscript of Luke, it shows up after 21:38.
6. Its style and vocabulary is more unlike the rest of John’s Gospel than any other paragraph in the Gospel.