

January 4, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from John 8:12-20.

1. What kind of limitations did the Pharisees face because they could judge only according to the flesh?
2. What does it mean to follow Christ and how do you exhibit that following?
3. What were the Pharisees driving at when they asked Jesus where His father was and why was it so bad?
4. In light of the Old Testament teaching, what would the Jews conclude when Jesus said that He is the light of the world?

JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD **John 8:12-20**

Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded several miracles and events during the bulk of Jesus' ministry. John, on the other hand, focused on very few situations as he presented proof that Jesus of Nazareth was God the Son. In chapter two, he wrote about two events early in Jesus' ministry. Nearly all of chapter three is about the conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus. The bulk of chapter four is about the woman of Samaria. Chapter five deals almost exclusively with Jesus' healing of the lame man on the Sabbath, and the resulting controversy. Chapter six records the miracle of feeding 5,000 and the lessons that Jesus taught on the next day as a result of the feeding. Chapters seven and eight focus only on the circumstances

surrounding the Feast of Tabernacles. In our future study, we will discover that chapter nine is all about Jesus healing the blind man. Chapter ten is the story of the Good Shepherd, and chapter eleven is about the raising of Lazarus. Then beginning with chapter twelve through the end of the book, John told in detail about the passion week, the crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus.

With those few examples, God the Holy Spirit inspired John to drive home the reality that Jesus is God. Therefore, He was altogether accurate and justified to declare during the Feast of Tabernacles, "I am the light of the world." If you and I heard someone make that claim today, we would quickly conclude that the person who said it was self-deceived, foolish, and a heretic of the worst order. That's pretty much how the religious scholars and leaders in Jesus' day felt about His claim. Their argument in response to Jesus proves their doubt well.

Many people today respond in a similar fashion when they hear the good news that God the Son has come to offer salvation from sin by shedding His blood on the cross. While they might claim to believe in God and might admit that they need salvation, the idea that the historical Jesus, the man from Nazareth, was God in the flesh is not acceptable to them. It is as Paul admitted, "*The word of the cross is folly to the ones who are perishing*" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Jesus declared, "I am the Light of the World." The religious people who were in the know about such things responded, "You can't just make that claim with no authority to back you up." In modern terms, that would be like me claiming to be Superman. Where are the witnesses who would affirm that phenomenal claim? In my case, there are none. In Jesus' case, He had the most honest, dependable, authoritative witness available—God Himself. If we don't want to believe God, that's our business. But it is a costly choice with eternal ramifications. The Pharisees proved how costly and foolish the choice was.

Follow Jesus or Walk in Darkness (v.12).

Our text is a continuation of John's account of Jesus teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles. *Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world"* (v.12a). The opening word, "Again" indicates

that Jesus continued to teach from where we left off at the end of chapter seven. The words we read in this part of the text are a continuation of the words from the previous setting. This means that as we begin 8:12, Jesus was still in Jerusalem. Jesus was still at the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus was still teaching at the temple (8:20). And it appears that the crowds were still listening, and the religious leaders still wanted to argue with Him.

His teaching in such settings was so authoritative that people in the crowd argued if He could be the promised prophet or the Christ. The Levites (the temple police) were so impressed they failed to arrest Him which is what their bosses sent them to do. It appears from the previous chapter that when the priests performed the ritual of pouring out the water from the Pool of Siloam, Jesus openly invited anyone who was spiritually thirsty to come to Him and find everlasting satisfaction (7:37). Now, still on the last day of the feast, Jesus capitalized on another ritual and used it to illustrate an amazing truth about Himself.

Jesus' reference to Himself as the light of the world probably identifies the setting for us. It seems quite certain that He made this statement at the ritual of *The Illumination of the Temple*. That ritual took place at dusk on each evening of the festival except the Sabbath. The priests lit four huge candelabra which stood in the court of the women. The idea was to shine much light on the temple, and to remind the people of the pillar of fire that guided their forefathers in the wilderness. Commemoration of that time was the whole purpose behind the Feast of Tabernacles (thus the people stayed in booths, tents).

The ritual must have been impressive. One writer stated, "There was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect their light." (F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel According to John*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983, p.206.) Even the most respectable of men danced for joy at the celebration. An ancient Jewish writing claims that "He who has not seen the joy of the place of water-drawing has never in his life seen joy" (Mishnah, *Sukkah* 5:1-4). That, of course, was reference to the ritual of water-pouring that was conjoined with this ritual of lamp-lighting. That joy carried over to the Illumination ritual. "Men of piety and good works danced through the night, holding burning torches in their hands and singing songs and praises.

The Levitical orchestras cut loose, and some sources attest that this went on every night of the Feast of Tabernacles, with the light from the temple area shedding its glow all over Jerusalem." (D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991, p.337).

In that setting, maybe as they were preparing to light the candelabra or had just lit them, Jesus shouted, "I am the light of the world." That is an incredible statement to people who are familiar with the Old Testament pictures of "light." David wrote, *Yahweh is my light and my salvation* (Ps. 27:1). God revealed to the prophet Isaiah, *Yahweh will be your everlasting light and your God will be your glory* (Isa. 60:19). Those are some very serious statements about the covenant God of Israel, Yahweh. God spoke through the prophet Micah, *Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me* (Micah 7:8). It is also true that the well-known pillar of light that their forefathers enjoyed in the wilderness was the presence of God Himself (Exo. 13:21). David concluded that the word of God, the law of God is light to our path (Ps. 119:105).

Therefore, it was quite plain to the people gathered in the court of the women at the temple that Jesus just claimed to be the God of the Old Testament. He was telling His peers that He was the light of God sent to the nations that they might know God. Seven hundred years before this event, God had promised through Isaiah to send His "Light" to His people. *And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them* (Isaiah 42:16). Then before the birth of Christ, Zechariah (John the Baptist's father), filled with the Holy Spirit promised of Jesus: *Because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace* (Luke 1:78-79). In Capernaum Jesus fulfilled that promise so that Matthew wrote, *The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned* (Matthew 4:16).

People who were paying attention (if there were any such people) would not have been surprised to hear Jesus declare this truth. His offer is easy to understand. He promised, *“Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* (v.12b). That is easy enough to grasp, isn’t it? Follow Him and you won’t walk in darkness. But maybe it was not so understandable to people who sat in darkness but didn’t realize it.

The Bible teaches that sin blinds us to reality. Sin is pictured as darkness because throughout Scripture darkness is presented as that which is foreboding, hiding, mysterious, and unknown. From the outset of Scripture, we read that at creation God thrust light into the darkness. At the exodus of God’s people from Egypt, God was the pillar of fire (light) that protected His people from the darkness. Job and his peers understood that the grave is darkness (Job 17:13). The wicked walk about in darkness (Psalm 82:5). Solomon concluded that *The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble* (Proverbs 4:19). At one time, you and I who are born again were sunk in darkness (Eph. 5:8). That is why we must *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness* (Eph. 5:11). Satan *blinds the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ* (2 Cor. 4:4).

Such was the state of those people who heard Jesus that day declare that He is the Light of the World. They were blindly walking through life hoping for a Messiah, looking for a king, longing for a Savior, and having no idea where to look for deliverance. And we are by nature no different. We all still walk in darkness from the moment we are born. Each of us is born in sin and, therefore, stumble around blindly looking for satisfaction. We face troubles and difficulty turning to everything from astrology to palm readers and counselors of every stripe. Our conscience convicts us of sin, and we stumble from religion to religion groping in darkness for something or someone to remove the burden.

Jesus stands and declaring loudly invites us to stop walking in darkness. What a wonderful invitation it is. “Jesus Christ alone brings the light of salvation to a sin-cursed world. To the darkness of falsehood He is the light of truth; to the darkness of ignorance He is the light of wisdom; to the darkness of sin He is the light of holiness; to the darkness of sorrow He is the light of joy; and to the darkness

of death he is the light of life.” (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, “John 1-11,” Chicago: Moody Press, 2006, p.335).

The invitation is clear and so is the promised result. Jesus promised that if we follow Him, we will enjoy the light of life. And Jesus still declares loudly, “I am the light of the world.” Jesus still invites people who are blinded by sin to follow Him. The verb translated *“follow”* can mean just what we expect it to mean, to follow after or walk behind. However, we discover in the Gospels that often when Jesus used the word, it meant to abandon life pursuits to become like Him. That is what He meant when He invited fishermen to follow Him and become His disciples. To be a disciple is to forsake all in order to become just like the teacher. That is real following. This is what Jesus means when He tells us, *“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”* (Mark 8:34).

Those people who buy up the invitation to die to self to live for Christ find they have the light of life. They will now understand the truth of the Bible. They will see how the Bible truth applies to real life. They will grasp the reality and joy of eternal life. This was an invitation for the people who were stumbling in sin to recognize their condition and accept Him as Savior from sin. And the only way Jesus can deliver anyone from sin is if He was God the Son. The religious leaders understood what Jesus offered.

Hypocrites Doubted Jesus’ Claim (vv.13-18).

The Pharisees rebuked Jesus for testifying about Himself. *So the Pharisees said to him, “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true”* (v.13). They were sure that Jesus was not allowed to testify about Himself (v.13a). The religious leaders argued that they could not accept Jesus’ claim based on His own authority. Of course we know from the Gospel stories that Jesus’ authority was always an issue because those religionists didn’t believe He was God the Son or that God sent Him. In fact, Jesus Himself had given them this ammunition to rebuff His testimony. Earlier, when He had healed the lame man on the Sabbath, Jesus told them, *“If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true”* (John 5:31).

Now they agreed with Him. They concluded that Jesus' testimony was untrue. That means they accused Jesus of lying. Anyone who rejects what Jesus has said about Himself concludes that He is dishonest or more bluntly, "He's a liar." It is a serious matter to accuse God of being a liar.

No doubt the doubters were quite sure they had Jesus cornered. But suddenly and simply Jesus cleared up the issue authoritatively (vv.14-18). He made it very clear that regardless of the confusion being experienced by the hypocrites, Jesus understood the truth about Himself. *Jesus answered, "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" (v.14).*

In light of Jesus' confession here, we need to go back to the previous quote where Jesus had acknowledged that His own testimony about Himself was not sufficient. Apparently, the rulers forgot what else Jesus said at that time. The full context reveals that while Jesus said that His testimony alone was not sufficient authority, He went on to say, *"I can do nothing on My own. As I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I seek not My own will but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5:30).* Then, in that setting, Jesus appealed to John the Baptist as His witness. And He didn't stop there. He also appealed to the testimony that is greater than John's—the works the Heavenly Father gave Him to do (John 5:36). He did those works because God the Father sent Him to do them and gave Him the authority to do them (5:37).

Therefore, Jesus' testimony about Himself is perfect, accurate, pure, and absolutely authoritative. When He speaks, His words are backed by the prophets, His own works, and the authority of God the Father who sent Him. It is not wise to reject His self-revelation which is still the Word of God, the Bible.

At issue was how the hypocrites judged Jesus. They judged Him by a different standard than He used to judge Himself (vv. 15-16). The Pharisees judged according to what they saw or experienced. Jesus pointed out, *You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one (v.15).* Judging according to the flesh was their only alternative. They rejected the truth of the Scripture, replacing it with their own rules. They were devoid of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, their only resource

for making judgments was human wisdom, human experience, and human emotions. That is the only resource any person out of fellowship with God has.

Jesus told the critics that He never made judgments on that basis. Rather, He gave true judgment that was affirmed by God His Father. He told them, *Yet even if I do judge, My judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent Me" (v.16).* Because Jesus did not cast judgment based on fleshly motives or instinct does not mean that He does not judge. He has to make judgments because He is the Judge of all the ages. *The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son (John 5:22).* And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man (John 5:27). Therefore, it is only fitting that Paul the Apostle should write to Timothy, *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom (2 Timothy 4:1).*

Jesus, having come from the Father, knew full well that He as the eternal Judge will make all final judgments. People who do not understand who Jesus is and that He came to earth from God cannot fathom the idea that He has the right to judge.

Furthermore, in this argument with the religious hypocrites, Jesus had the law on His side (vv.17-18). God's law accepted the testimony of two people as true. Jesus reminded the Pharisees, *In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true (v.17).* He referred to God's law as "your law" because those people were so proud to be the keepers of it (though they never did). The law they claimed to uphold states, *A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established (Deuteronomy 19:15).*

Okay, Jesus was fine with that. He affirmed that He had the two witnesses. God the Son and God the Father made for an irrefutable testimony. He said, *"I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about Me" (v.18).* Do we marvel at these mere humans arguing with their Creator? Do we not marvel at all created beings who reject the authority of their Creator? Maybe you are like the Pharisees and do not recognize Jesus as your Creator.

Hypocrites Doubted Jesus' Origin (vv.19-20).

That they doubted is not surprising because the Pharisees were confused by their flesh. This is revealed in that they questioned the whereabouts of Jesus' Father. *They said to Him therefore, "Where is Your Father?" (v.19a)*. This was probably a reference to Joseph. As far as we can tell, Joseph was dead by this time. So why the appeal to an earthly father? Jesus was appealing to the witness of God His heavenly Father, but the Pharisees were so ignorant and so obnoxious that they instinctively switched the argument to an earthly father. Let's not forget that they can only judge according to the flesh.

Ultimately, they were driving toward their opinion that Jesus was illegitimate. Within the same context of this argument, *They said to Him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father – even God" (John 8:41)*.

Rather than striking the fools dead for their arrogant blasphemy, which He could have done, Jesus exposed their ignorance. *Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father. If you knew Me, you would know My Father also" (v.19b)*. The problem was that the Pharisees did not know God. They claimed that they not only knew God but were God's choicest leaders. They not only talked about God but every aspect of their lives was centered on their opinions about God. They prided themselves in being the guardians of God's Scripture—the Old Testament. They prayed to God loudly and publicly. They pleaded for God's judgment against nearly everyone except themselves. But though they might invoke the name of God two dozen times a day, they did not know Him.

Because Jesus set the standard of "knowledge of God" in this context, it has to mean "to know God intimately in a personal relationship." That is not the same as knowing God through the amassing of facts about God. The use of the perfect tense verb here means, "You have never come to know God in the past with continuing results in your life." There was never a time when they had come face-to-face with who God is and established a relationship with Him. That kind of intimate knowledge of God is impossible for people who reject God the Son. People who reject God the Son must of necessity reject God the Father. Like the Pharisees, they claim to believe in God. So do the demons and they tremble (James 2:19).

But, since Jesus Christ is the perfect manifestation of God, we cannot reject Him and be right with God.

And no one arrested Jesus. This is an interesting statement in light of the fact that we see Jesus in this setting preaching publicly. *These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple (v.20a)*. More exactly, Jesus was in the women's court. That does not mean that only women were allowed there, but that the courtyard was as far into the temple precincts as women were allowed to go. In that courtyard were the multiple funnel-shaped offering boxes where people put their offerings. This is where Jesus was when He pointed out the poor woman who gave her penny offering. It is all part of the picture of God coming down to teach at His house where He was rejected by the people who had taken oversight of His house.

But no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come (v.20b). No one could arrest Jesus before His hour of glory. Though Jesus ripped back the curtain and exposed the Pharisees' hypocrisy, no one arrested Him. Since the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious body in Israel, met in a building that bordered the temple grounds, these rulers were within earshot of Jesus' teaching. They hated what He said and what He stood for. They had already determined to kill Him and had sent the temple police to arrest Him. But they were not in charge as much as they thought. Here Jesus was offending them in their "house" as it were (the house they stole from God). They were powerless to do anything. They would not be able to arrest, torture, and kill God the Son until God the Father determined that it was time.

What a picture of human pride, arrogance, and ignorance is painted for us here. We pride ourselves in knowing what is the best path to take in life, in what is the best way to live, and even in what we need to do to get to heaven. All the while we are stumbling around in spiritual darkness that is caused by our pride and self-determination. But the alternative is too humiliating. The alternative to stumbling in darkness is to bow in submission to the man from Nazareth. The right thing is to acknowledge that the man who died on the cross was actually God the Son who paid for our sins with His own blood. What an embarrassing thing it is for us to admit that our pride and ignorance was the cause of our Creator's torture and death. And yet, identifying fully with that cross of shame and following after Christ is our only means for finding light and life.

