

## The Light of the World

John 8:1-20

One of the most instinctually frightening experiences I have ever had was to crawl inside of a 48" diameter concrete water supply pipe shortly after it was installed in the ground, in order to inspect the seals which the contractor had used to join the 20 foot sections of pipe together. I was working for the engineer who had designed the pipeline, and the line had obviously not yet been tested with water. I had a light with me, of course, but the fearfulness of that experience was the absolute darkness that existed as soon as I had walked in a number of feet. Absolute and total darkness.

Darkness is fearful, isn't it? That's why we often put night lights in children's bedrooms. And if you go outside at night, though seldom are you in total darkness, still there is a sense of fearfulness.

Jesus uses that instinctive reaction to darkness to emphasize his message of the gospel. The gospel is a message of light. And Jesus, himself, is the light. We've seen this illustration before.

John 1:4 "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

Also, John 3:19 "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

Actually, Jesus' entire ministry is a fulfillment of the great promise of the prophet Isaiah.

Is. 9:2 "The people who walked in darkness Have seen a

great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined."

This morning, we come to the explicit statement of Jesus as he fulfills that prophecy, the second of the great "I am..." sayings. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." We'll study first how the unbelieving Jews respond to that light, as well as Jesus' response to that rejection. Clearly, not everyone saw the light. In fact,

### I. JESUS IS REJECTED BY UNBELIEVERS.

v.13

They called him a liar. They discredited his testimony, because he was speaking about himself. And this is the root of all rebellion against Jesus, then and now.

#### A. Unbelievers reject Jesus' authority to speak truth.

"Your witness is not true."

Can you imagine such bold arrogance, to say such a thing to Jesus! Yet, people still say such things, even so many who call themselves Christians today. They say, "I don't believe the testimony of Jesus." They hold up the Bible, which is the written testimony of Jesus, and say, "I don't believe this." They point out errors, untruth. And they call Jesus a liar. To confess that the Bible is anything but inerrant, to proclaim that it contains even one error, one untruth, is to claim that Jesus is a liar. It is to reject Jesus' authority to speak truth, for Jesus is the Word of God, the word which became flesh and dwelt among us.

That's why the doctrine of inspiration and infallibility of the Bible is of such crucial importance, because the word of Jesus is true. That's why we must uphold and maintain the doctrine that revelation has ceased, in Jesus, because all so-called continuing

revelation, all of it, cannot measure up to this standard of perfection, “thy word is truth.” Absolute truth. Truth for you and truth for me. There is no such thing as private or personal revelation, something that is true for you and not for me, something that applies to you and not to me. If it’s revelation from God, it is true, it is inspired, it is infallible, and it is applicable to everyone of us. For the witness of Jesus, through whom God has spoken so fully, his witness is true.

People are still saying to Jesus today, “Your witness is not true.” And they are still doing what the Pharisees do as well in our text this morning.

### **B. Unbelievers deny Jesus’ identity as God.**

They deny his relationship to the Father.

v.19

We’ve seen this denial of Jesus’ deity and divine origin frequently in the past months of studying the gospel of John. It is the common objection of many, still common today. It is what separates Christians from Jehovah’s Witnesses and from Mormons. It is what separates us from Judaism, Islam, from Hinduism, from every other religion. It’s not enough just to talk about God, even to use his biblical name of Jehovah. We must talk about Jesus, the son of God, the one who claimed equality with God, and yet did not claim all the rights of his godhead but surrendered his own human life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Jesus was sent by God the father, the God whom the Jews claimed to know. But they didn’t know him, because in rejecting the son, they rejected the Father who sent him.

Jesus speaks so clearly.

v.19

In other words, if you don’t know Jesus, you cannot rightly say that you know God! If you don’t believe in Jesus, you cannot rightly say that you believe in God. This rebuke will reach a climax in the verses we will study in a few weeks,

John 8:53 “Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom do You make Yourself out to be?” 54 Jesus answered, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. 55 “Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, ‘I do not know Him,’ I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word.”

Thus,

### **II. JESUS CONDEMNS THOSE WHO REJECT HIM.**

Quite strongly, I might add, though with the protection of the crowd’s approval. And we see the repeated refrain of the inability of his enemies to harm him, before the appointed time!

v.19-20

Let’s study the nature of this condemnation, which is essentially a response to the accusation of untruth. Jesus defines truth for these unbelievers, and he defines it in such a way as to condemn those who don’t believe it. And I do believe that is why people reject the truth of Jesus, because it condemns them! If it is true, it condemns them in their unbelief.

And, of course, it is true. First of all,

### **A. Jesus defines truth in himself.**

Now, the Pharisees had a technical, legal argument on their side. The law required two witnesses to prove a point in court. Two witnesses, therefore Jesus couldn’t merely define and

defend himself. Jesus will answer that objection so clearly, in,  
v.16-18

So there are two witnesses, for you technical lawyers out there, wanting to hang your hat on legalisms and self-righteous legal technicalities. But Jesus offers a much deeper defense. He condemns those who deny his identity by proclaiming the truth of his divine identity.

v.14

“My witness is true.” That’s what we must continually tell people today. The witness of Jesus is true! It is the definition of truth. It is true in an absolute sense. There is nothing relative, nothing conditional in it. It is true. Period.

And this is the truth. Jesus was sent by God his father. And he will return to God his father. He is the son of God who was with the father in the beginning, the word, through whom God created all things that were created. And that word, Jesus, was not only with God. He was God.

As God, as the son of God sent by God the father, he shall return to his heavenly home. He shall return to the right hand of God his father.

And those Pharisees? Jesus condemns them for denying both of those things.

v.14b

So our doctrine is important. An accurate and precise theological and doctrinal understanding of God is important. Knowing God, deeply, is important. Understanding the nature of God is important. Understanding the relationship between the Father and the Son is important.

Now, you will never fully know God and never fully understand him, as long as you live on this earth during this age, but that incompleteness of your knowledge of God should never leave you content with a shallow knowledge of him. And I am convinced of this, that as you know more of God, as you understand more of Jesus, you will be enabled and stirred to love him more deeply.

That’s why we should understand the deep truth of God, the deep truth of the identity of Jesus Christ, so that we can more accurately, more passionately, more deeply, and more obediently, worship him with the fullest expressions of our love.

Jesus defines that truth in himself, and therefore condemns those who reject him. Secondly,

## **B. Jesus defines truth in his judgment.**

v.15

His purpose in coming to earth was not for judgment, but for salvation. Surely, he will return in judgment, but the primary emphasis was the atoning sacrifice of his own body and blood.

But,

v.16

“My main purpose now isn’t to judge, but when I do judge, it is true!”

This is a review for us.

John 5:26 “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, 27 "and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. 28 "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 "and come forth-- those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those

who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

We have in John 8 an example of Jesus’ judgment, too. More accurately, a description of his condemnation for the hypocrisy of the external judgment of the Pharisees. It is the occasion of the woman caught in adultery.

I need to say briefly, but clearly, that verses 1-11 of John 8 are greatly disputed, as to whether or not they are original to John, and whether or not, therefore, they belong in the text of the Bible. I don’t want to spend lots of time on it, but I’ll summarize the debate this way. The verses are included in large numbers of later manuscripts, and where, therefore included in the manuscripts which were the basis of the King James translation back in 1611. And because there are so many manuscripts that include them, many believe them to be authentic.

Yet, the earliest manuscripts, and the most reliable of those earliest manuscripts, don’t contain these words. And the words don’t seem to fit the style and use of language familiar to John. It appears that they were added later. So many translations make note that they likely weren’t in the original gospel of John, but include them since they have become so familiar. Most people who think they aren’t original with John still agree that this encounter did likely happen, and the description of the events were passed down verbally and eventually added to the text of John. And I would put myself in that group. I suspect they describe an actual event, but were not written by John as he wrote his gospel, and there are many more reasons which give me some confidence in that conviction. And I should emphasize, therefore, that our doctrine of inspiration and infallibility refers to the original writings in the original languages, not to English translations, so I am not in the least contracting what I’ve been saying about God’s word being true.

So, historically, I accept this account as true, yet I don’t think it to be part of the original gospel of John. Nonetheless, we’ll use the account as an example of the truthfulness of Jesus’ judgment, compared with the superficiality, and falsehood, of the Pharisees judgmental condemnation of this woman.

v.11

Now, it’s not that Jesus is making light of adultery. In fact, he labels it sin and tells the woman to sin no more. But he reveals the horrible hypocrisy of people he often called “white washed tombs.” The lesson is the same as we read in,

Mat 7:1 “Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 "Or how can you say to your brother, `Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”

“With what judgment you judge, you will be judged.” There is their condemnation, isn’t it. And that is Jesus’ point with this adulterous woman. She had sinned. And those who stood to condemn her, would be condemning themselves of their own law-breaking. Thus Jesus invites them,

v.7

None of them could judge righteously.

v.9

Unlike those hypocrites, Jesus defines truth in his judgment. And, I might add, he will reveal the perfection of that true

judgment when he returns at the end of this age. As he says, "My judgment is righteous."

Let me read a description of that great judgment, from, Rev. 16:4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying: "You are righteous, O Lord, The One who is and who was and who is to be, Because You have judged these things. 6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due." 7 And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments." 8 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory."

"It is their just due." They deserve it! And this fact is certain, Heb.9:27 "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment."

Jesus condemns those who reject him, by telling them of his own righteous judgment. And you, along with them, can be assured of this, that,

Heb. 10:31 "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

And so I come back to the point that,

### **C. Jesus defines truth in his relationship to his father.**

And as he defined that relationship, he condemns those who don't believe it.

v.18-19

All of that brings us back to the main point.

### **III. JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.**

v.12

Those words imply that the world needs light, that the world is in a naturally dark condition. Jesus' words presuppose that the world exists in spiritual and moral darkness, and has existed in that state ever since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin in the garden of Eden. All the advances of man notwithstanding, we still read in,

Is. 60:2 "The darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you."

Darkness shall cover the earth. The people shall walk in darkness. There shall be ignorance and rebellion in matters of the Lord. People do not know God, and they do not love him. They are living in darkness, the darkness of separation from God.

I emphasize this because this is precisely the stumbling block which keeps many people from salvation in Christ. They don't believe that they are blind. They don't believe that they are living in darkness. Instead, they believe themselves to be enlightened, knowledgeable of sufficient truth to free them from any thoughts of the eternal condemnation of hell which is God's just judgment upon all men. They don't believe themselves to be lost. They don't believe themselves to be children of wrath, after all, in our age of spiritual enlightenment, all religions lead to the same place, and all gods are but one and the same. Just with different names.

But Jesus says “NO.” He says, “I am the light of the world, the light of this dark world.” And we read that,

**A. Jesus’ followers must walk in his light.**

v.12

“He who follows me” means “he who claims to be my disciple.” He who claims to be a Christian. And here, following is the same as believing. It does not merely mean imitating and copying, but trusting, putting faith in him. Believing in his name and therefore living in his ways.

And so we have a promise and a command, wrapped up into one. There is a promise to those who are the disciples of Jesus. They shall walk in the light, in his light. He shall govern and rule their lives, he shall direct their paths. It’s a glorious promise, for those used to walking in darkness. And it’s a great command. They must walk in the light. It is not enough to gaze upon and admire the light. We must follow it.

That means for us, we must not walk in darkness. There is much to be said about that. The darkness would refer to the darkness of ignorance and lack of knowledge of God. And we must not walk, we must not live, with that ignorance. Indeed, you will not, if Jesus is your Lord and Savior.

There is also, no doubt, a reference to the darkness of sin. We shall not, yea we will not, walk in the darkness of sin, living our lives under the dominion and oppressive slavery of sin.

Indeed, the Scripture would teach us that how we walk identifies who we are. Those who walk in the darkness are separated from Christ. And, by definition, those who are the followers of Christ, walk in his light. Turn with me to,

1 John 1:5 “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Similarly,

1 John 2:8 “Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. 9 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. 10 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”

To walk in his light is to live as he lived, in obedience to the revealed will of God. And so we read in,

1 Thes. 5:4 “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.”

So I will declare to you, that if you consider yourself one of Jesus’ followers, then you must determine to walk in his light! That is your obligation. Even as you hear and receive this promise, that you shall walk in his light! He shall shine that light upon you, the light of his presence, the light of understanding and

knowledge.

I will often give my testimony of salvation in the words of this familiar illustration. For me, having grown up in church all my life, but never hearing or being able to hear the message of the gospel, one night, quite distinct from my own rational or intellectual abilities, I heard the gospel and I responded. It wasn't a long, reasoned response, as it might have been for some of you. It was instantaneous. I knew what I had to do, and I did it.

What happened? The light bulb went on! The spiritual light bulb. I saw the light, and God was the one who turned it on. In later years, as I studied theology, I learned a great answer in our shorter catechism to accurately define my experience. It's a question I quote often, probably my favorite of all the catechism questions, "Effectual calling is the work of God's grace, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he does persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel."

When I say in common words, "the light bulb came on," precise theologians say, "God enlightened my mind." It's the same thing, isn't it?

It's a promise. And a command.  
v.12

Note the second half of that verse.

**B. Jesus' followers have life in him.**  
The light is life. It is the light of life.

Obviously, Jesus' is speaking symbolically. He's using an

illustration. Light symbolizes life. Darkness symbolizes death. It's an illustration that all of us can understand.

It refers to spiritual light. Spiritual life. It is the light of the knowledge of God. The light of the enjoyment of the presence of God. It is the light of eternal life. It is the light of salvation. We read in,

1 Peter 2:9 "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

The very central message of the gospel is put in terms of light, when the Apostle Paul preaches to King Agrippa, testifying of his own conversion and calling. Paul testifies that God had said to him,

Act 26:16 "Rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. 17 I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

That calling is passed on to all who preach the gospel today, myself included. My calling is to preach the word to people, "to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in [Jesus]."

And so I do. And I proclaim that light to you, the light of life. Jesus, the light of the world. And I will tell you with all of my breath that there is life, eternal life, in Jesus. If you would but believe in him, and all that he has revealed of himself. And receive him as Lord, bowing your soul to his sovereign rule and authority. If you would confess your sins and trust him, you, too, will have life. And life everlasting. For Jesus is the light of the world. Follow him, that you might have the light of life.