

April 26, 2026

“I AM: The Light of the World”

John 1:1-5 and 8:12-20; Isaiah 60:1-3, 19-22

This is Week #3 in our series on the “I AM” statements of Jesus. I encourage you to read or listen to the first two sermons Josh preached if you missed those. [The first is foundational; last week was “I AM the Bread of Life.”] John, in his Gospel account, is making it crystal clear that Jesus IS God – the Almighty I AM. I like what one of Josh’s professors told him: “what Matthew, Mark and Luke whisper about Jesus, John shouts.” And he doesn’t waste any time getting that message across. I want to help us jump into this week’s “I AM” statement from John 8 – “I AM the Light of the World” – by first RE-reading the very beginning of John 1, which – Josh reminded us – serves as the overture for the entire Gospel. Then I’ll read John 8.

Read **John 1:1-5, 8:12-20**

PRAY: Gracious God, may “Your word is a lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path.” (Psalm 119:105)

A good metaphor isn’t always as precise as we might prefer. A metaphor usually doesn’t come with much of an explanation. It doesn’t answer every question we might ask or fit perfectly with every situation. In other words, we can’t just slap a shepherd or loaf of bread or vine or a gate into every detail of everyone’s life. Nevertheless, a good metaphor IS clear in a way that always connects with real life – whether or not we can completely wrap our minds around it in one sitting. And that’s another great thing about metaphors: they keep speaking to us; showing us new ways of seeing and understanding our ever-changing, everyday lives.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus reveals who He is using seven powerful metaphors; accessible word-pictures and images from earthy-everyday life. These metaphors are brief descriptors of Jesus, and they were heard/understood in the broader context of both the scriptures and worshipping lives – and practices – of these regular people.

Did you notice Jesus doesn’t have to overexplain Himself? [As far as we know, Jesus didn’t publish a 500-page research paper on His I AM statements; He left that for others.]

I was recently introduced to an Armenian Orthodox theologian who taught at the University of Virginia. I only learned about Vigen Guroian **[picture]** because he was Winn Collier’s doctoral supervisor; and I like to read Winn Collier. Guroian once said something that Collier passed on recently. **“If we try to over-describe too much of our faith, we will veer into heresy.” (Vigen Guroian)** I might add, veer into irrelevance, immobility or indifference.

That doesn't mean we get to be sloppy about who Jesus is using vague descriptions that minimize His divinity and/or humanity or turn His teaching into mere ethics curriculum. But it does mean we don't have to overthink everything before we let what Jesus says about Himself sink in and become true in our ordinary, everyday lives. So, first the context.

Where and when did Jesus declare, "I AM the light of the world"?

John 7 and 8 take place during the great festival called The Feast of Tabernacles/Booths. At this feast Jews celebrate the fall harvest while also remembering God's provision during their 40 years in the wilderness. Water and Light are some of the main symbols during Feast of Tabernacles. In John 7 Jesus declares that anyone who is thirsty can come to Him and drink freely; that He has living water available for those who believe. It's not quite an I AM statement, but it IS metaphor; and it's an echo of what He personally told the Woman at the Well in John 4.

It was this bold statement (and other things He'd already said and done) that gets the religious leaders even more serious about getting rid of Jesus. He's really starting to get under their skin. Metaphor. And they think anyone who thinks Jesus is Messiah is blind; wrong; 'in the dark' as we say. Metaphor.

John 8 starts with the story of the woman caught in adultery. In that heated moment and in a creative way, Jesus exposes the darkness in the hearts of her accusers. We might say Jesus 'sheds light' on what's really going on. But He goes further than saying I shed light: [Ego Eimi] "I AM the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) He's not using a flashlight. He is the Source of Light. So that's the when and where of this statement; an actual place at an actual time in which God's people were focused on actual events and symbols; metaphors.

Let's think about the other context they heard these words of Jesus: their scriptural context. Let's go back as far as the scriptures take us. "In the beginning" (Genesis 1 was our Call To Worship) God spoke light into existence . . . "Let there be light!" And, for a time, everything is brilliant and beautiful and just the way everything is supposed to be. But then darkness arrives. Darkness depicts a sort of blindness; the inability to see. Darkness is also a metaphor for evil and sin – which are sometimes called "deeds of darkness;" rampant then and rampant now.

But, remember, God is stronger than the darkness. Even when God's people are in exile – one of the worst moments of darkness in Israel's history – [even then] God points the people back toward the light.

Early glimmers of hope are heard through the prophet Isaiah: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.” (Isaiah 9:2)

Isaiah 60 is an even bigger turning point, filled with more hope, and what feels like an imminent moment of deliverance. “Arise, shine; your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” (Isaiah 60:1) Verses 19-20 suggest God’s people will ‘have a permanent source of light; better than the sun and moon.’ “For the Lord will be your everlasting light and your days of mourning shall be ended.” (Isaiah 60:20b)

Chapter 60 ends with this promise: “I am the Lord; in its time I will accomplish it **quickly**.” (Isaiah 60:22b) We can debate the word “quickly” but we’re also not eternal or infinite. Are we? We’re also not very patient. Are we?

The Good News is that God DOES keep His promises. “Light” DOES come, but in a different way than it came “in the beginning.” At the beginning of John’s gospel, he goes back **before** the beginning. And in his opening “overture” John says, “The Word . . . was the life of all people.” (John 1:4) And then he declares this by faith: “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:5)

We run into this same melody-line about Jesus being light again in John 3. Right after the famous John 3:16 and the still important John 3:17, Jesus says, “And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.” (John 3:19-21)

Are we drawn to the light of Jesus? Are we drawn to the One who IS light?  
Always? In every situation? In every relationship?  
During every temptation? In every area of life?

We’re probably NOT drawn to the light in the darkest areas of our lives. And the dark areas don’t have to be major, heinous acts of violence or greed. There are dark/blind spot areas in all of our lives. This may include our speech/words/how we talk – including how we talk about others, our bank accounts/finances, our busy-ness and over-crowded schedules, our judgmental spirit, our tendency to complain rather than express gratitude, our impatience, our addiction we think we have under control, our divisiveness, our unwillingness to serve the poor, orphan, widow and immigrant, or our obsession with lesser things; not bad things, but lesser things like football, coffee, politics and bands like U2.

Alright. That’s a lot of context: place, time, setting and scripture. Here’s one more little detail. If you were there listening to Jesus during The Feast of Tabernacles, it’s possible that His

backdrop in the Treasury of the Temple (where John tells us He was in verse 20) included 4 huge lamps that were lit every evening. Those lamps – metaphors – were meant to remind the Israelites that God led them through the wilderness by a pillar of fire at night.

So now. Put yourself in the middle of that scripture and setting . . .

Can you hear Him making this claim directly to us? To you personally?

“I AM the light of YOU and YOUR world.”

Can you hear Him reminding you and me of the many times He **HAS** shown us the way?

Been a “lamp to our feet and light to our path”?

Shed light on the darkness – around us and IN us?

Now, what is our response to Jesus’ declaration – I AM the Light of YOUR World?

Do we need to study the metaphor further?

Come up with a modern-day replacement?

[LED; battery operated, solar-powered?]

How about this for response?

Instead of figuring everything out, what if we actually submit to who Jesus is – THE LIGHT OF OUR WORLD. Let’s let who He is have its way; chase away the darkness; even overwhelm us?

Vigen Guroian also said, “We need to be dizzied by the metaphors.” (Vigen Guroian)

Sometimes light makes us dizzy in a not so good way, right? “That’s too bright!” Light can stop us in our tracks because it’s too much to take in all at once. Maybe – beside all of the obvious metaphorical applications of what it means for Jesus to be **THE** Light and Our Light – [maybe] we need to let Jesus stop us in our tracks. Maybe, once again or for the first time, we need to be overcome by the light of Christ in a way that changes the way we see everything and everyone else . . . including ourselves.

I thought it fitting that this I AM statement fell on Sharefest Weekend. Jesus did declare that HE is the Light of the World. But you may remember what He also said at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew’s Gospel. “You are the light of the world . . . Let your light shine before others so they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14-16) We are never called to be the Source of Light; as if it’s our job to dazzle or overwhelm or overpower others. [As in “I AM pretty amazing aren’t I?”]

But we are called to reflect the light and glory of who Jesus is to a hurting and disoriented world; to do so with clarity – about who HE is – and humility, because we are often dis-oriented and in the dark too. May Jesus be “a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.”