

Believe

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

SERMON TITLE: I AM the Light of the World
SCRIPTURE: John 8:12-30

DATE: February 16, 2020
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“These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ” (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

Sometimes we don't think about “obvious” things. They're so much a part of life we don't pay much attention to them. One of those things is light. Think about light for a moment. First of all, light brings life. Second, light lights our way. Third, light calms our fears. Fourth, light is symbolic of truth. Fifth, light brings healing and health. Thank you Captain Obvious! The point is: We need the light of Jesus deep in our souls just like we need the light of the sun for our bodies. The whole world needs Jesus the light of the world. Jesus is the light that brings life—he is the light that lights our way—he is the light that calms our fears—he is the light of God's truth—he is the light that brings health and healing and joy—and one more—he is the light that reveals to us what God is really like.

John 8:12 — The context for this verse was the Feast of Tabernacles which we have discussed at length in earlier messages. On the last day (the eighth day) of the feast (7:37), in the evening, there was a festival of lights that commemorated how God led the children of Israel in the wilderness with a pillar of fire by night. The Mishnah is the collected, recorded oral traditions of the Jews, and the Mishnah's chapter about the light ceremonies states that you haven't seen true wonder until you've seen Jerusalem lit up! It was a truly magical scene. And it was during this time that Jesus stood and shouted, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” So there are three questions I want to ask and answer in the passage we are studying today.

- (1) *What exactly is Jesus saying when he claims to be the Light of the World?* First of all, he is saying that the world is a dark place. We wouldn't need light if there was no darkness. (see Isaiah 5:20 and 59:9-10). Second, Jesus is saying, “Unless I am your light, you will walk in darkness.”—so—
- (2) *How do we live in the Light?* According to v12, it's by following Jesus. What does it mean to follow Jesus? First, following Jesus means that Jesus is the leader and you are not. Second, following Jesus means “walking with Jesus”—figuring out how to take the next step with him. Third, following Jesus means anyone and everyone is invited. Now, just to be clear, following Jesus is not about becoming a religious person (vv.13-20). The religious leaders are opposing Jesus. They are rejecting his bold claim to be the light of the world. So what we are seeing here is that Jesus, the light of the world, is calling out the darkness of religion. He came to expose darkness even in religion. Religion tells you to try to gain God's favor by obeying religious rules and by observing religious rituals. But religion is just another kind of darkness. In fact, sometimes religion will oppose God in the name of God. That is what's happening here. What Jesus says and has been saying is this—“I am here to tell you what the Father has told me to tell you. I am here to do the works the Father has given me to do. I am here to show you what the Father is really like. So, he's saying, “By opposing me, you are opposing the one who sent me and that proves you don't really know the Father.” Mark it down—Following Jesus is not about becoming a religious person. And here's why—(vv. 8:21-24)—b/c—look at it again—v24—religious people will die in their sin—irreligious people *and* religious people will die in their sin. This is a hard saying, but Jesus says as clearly as it can be said—*Those who reject me or oppose me or ignore me or lump me in with all the other religious founders of the world will die in their sin.* Unless you believe that Jesus is who he claimed to be—God come in the flesh—you will die in your sin. Now, those are the words of Jesus so they must be loving words. He's not saying this in anger. He's saying it in love. It is not his desire that any would perish but that all would come into his light. *Religion says*, be a good person, do these good things, thankfully God grades on a curve so you'll be fine—that's darkness. Jesus says, “Unless you believe in me you will die in your sins. You might say, “But I can't believe God would send anyone to hell.” Well, God doesn't send people to hell. People choose to go there b/c they refuse to put their faith in Jesus.

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Jesus doesn't say, "Unless you believe in me, God will send you to hell—he says, "Unless you believe in me, you will die in your sins." We choose to live in Jesus' light or our own darkness and whatever we choose stands for eternity. There are no second chances. So let me ask you—*Do you believe in Jesus? Have you put your trust in Jesus for salvation?* It all comes down to Jesus. You step out of darkness into light when you believe in Jesus. That's the starting line and then you follow him to the finish line. You walk in the light as he is in the light. And to step into the light just tell Jesus you want out of the darkness you're in. Tell him you do believe in him and him alone for the forgiveness of your sins. Okay, I know. I hear you. You're asking, "But why is Jesus the *only* light that leads us out of darkness? Can't there be other ways to God?"

- (3) *Why is Jesus and Jesus alone the light of the world?*—(vv28-29)—The reason that Jesus is the only light of the world is b/c he was lifted up (v24). That phrase is veiled language/code language for the Cross. I'm sure some in the crowd thought Jesus was finally speaking their language. They thought he was saying, "When I'm exalted to my rightful place of Messiah King then you'll know who I really am." But Jesus is saying, "You will succeed in murdering me, but it is through my death that I will be exalted." He's saying, "The Father sent me to love you, to seek you, to save you, to forgive you, and to give you eternal life." He's saying, "I AM the light of the world, but first, I have to be lifted up. I have to die for your sins so you won't have to. I have to rise from the dead so you'll know I can raise you from the dead. I have to ascend back to my Father in heaven so I can intercede for you. *Veiled language*: lifted up on the Cross; lifted up out of the grave; lifted up back into heaven so we can have the light of life—v30—And—*and this is the best part*—"As he was saying these things, MANY believed in him!!!" Look, this is so simple. *As he said these things many believed in him*. In other words, as they listened to the truth that's in Jesus, they changed their minds about Jesus. They heard what *he said* and, in their hearts, *they said*, "Jesus, I believe you." They turned from rejecting Jesus and they received Jesus. They turned from ignoring Jesus to embracing Jesus. They turned from opposing Jesus to agreeing with Jesus. I'm inviting you—we are inviting you—Jesus is inviting you—Be one of the many who believe in him as your only hope for forgiveness and life and you will have the light of life.

Discussion Starters:

Read John 8:12-30

Icebreaker —When was a time when you desperately wanted there to be more light? Why did you need it, and what happened?

Ask: What is something that you learned or that stood out to you from this sermon or this passage? Why is it significant? What did you hear that resonated with you? What new thoughts and insights did you have?" When someone volunteers an "AHA," ask follow up questions to dig deeper into that "AHA" to keep the discussion going. Ask the group, "*Anyone else have this same thought or have other thoughts about that? Or ask: What do you think about this insight?*" After you've exhausted that topic, throw the original question back out to the group, "*Who else had an "AHA?"*" —Repeat the pattern above. If someone says, "*I didn't really have an "AHA," it's more that I don't understand.*" Then go that direction. Ask follow-up questions to help them clearly articulate the issue. "*Anybody else think about that/struggle with that?*" Ask the group for input, "*So, how would you answer that question?*" Whoever answers, ask follow up questions, ask for input from the group on that answer (*What do you think about that?*), etc. The repeat the same conversation pattern by asking—*What's your "take-away" from the message and our discussion? What is one thing you can take-away and put into action?*

Additional Questions:

1. Charlie talked not wanting to convert people to religion, but to follow Jesus. Why is it necessary to make this distinction as we share the gospel with non-believers? What are some clear distinctions between religion and following Jesus?
2. What are practical ways that we can be a light in the darkness in our homes, our work, and our communities? What prevents us from being a light?
3. Why is Jesus and only Jesus the Light of the World?