

I AM

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

DATE

August 22 & 23

WEEK

2 of 7

OVERVIEW

John 8:12-30

KEY VERSE

John 8:12

SETTING THE STAGE

To appreciate the words of Jesus in chapter 8, we must understand the context. In chapter 7 the Jewish people were celebrating one of their week-long feasts, the Feast of Tabernacles. One of the most jubilant feasts, it is filled with both celebration and remembrance, honoring God's provision and protection for the people of Israel during their 40 years wandering in the wilderness. For seven days of the feast, people live in temporary tent structures as they did in the wilderness during the time of Moses. The Lord Himself was present with the Israelites in the desert, in a tented temple called the Tabernacle. The feast also celebrates His presence as He tabernacles (dwells) with us. ¹

The Feast of Tabernacles takes place during the early fall in the harvest season. Harvest was another cause for celebration; honoring the Lord's provisions through their crops. Though this was a celebratory time for the people, it was a challenging time for Jesus. It was during this festival that the opposition began to grow and intensify towards Him and His ministry. However, this did not distract Jesus from His message. He used several observed rituals as teachable moments to talk about "living water" in chapter 7 and "light" in chapter 8.

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LESSON OUTLINE

1. I Am
2. The Light of the World
3. Beyond the World

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Feast of Tabernacles was also known as the Feast of Booths. It was one of 3 major feasts for the Jewish people. The other two were Passover and Pentecost.
- In John 8 Jesus says in verse 32, *"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free."*

I AM

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Setting the Stage, continued >

A major feature of the Feast of Tabernacles was the lighting of giant lampstands (candelabras) outdoors in the women's court of the temple. The wicks were made from the priests' worn-out garments. The light illuminated the temple area and the people gathered to sing praises and dance. The light symbolized how God was with them in their wanderings in the wilderness in a pillar of cloud by day which turned to fire at night. ²

It is believed that the glow from the lighted candelabras could be seen across the city. For many, it would bring a remembrance of Scripture such as Psalm 27:1, "*The Lord is my light and my salvation.*" Or perhaps, Psalm 119:105, "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*" It likely reminded them of these words found in Isaiah 60:1, "*Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*" Each evening of the seven nights of the Feast of Tabernacles the priests would light these giant candelabras penetrating the darkness with light. On the last evening they would blow out the candles, the light would be extinguished, and the darkness would return.

At the end of chapter 7, the festival is concluding, the lights have been extinguished. It is believed to be in this setting where Jesus says the second of the *I Am* statements found in John 8:12, "*I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.*"

Introduction

In Genesis 1, we have the creation of the world when God created the heavens and the earth. And the very first words of creation spoken by God are found in Genesis 1:3, *Then God said, "Let there be light;" and there was light.* In the beginning, God spoke the world into existence. And "light" changed everything.

John begins his gospel with a parallel to Genesis 1 about creation. He introduces Jesus as the *Word* and the *Light*.

JOHN 1:1-5 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*

John utilizes this metaphor of light and darkness throughout the pages of his gospel as he unveils the stories and truth of Jesus Christ. For instance, in John 3, half of the chapter is a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus which takes place in the darkness of night. It is during this dialogue that John 3:16 is spoken by Jesus Himself. The darkness is also referenced by Jesus in John 3:19,

¹ <https://www.wycliffe.org/feast/7-feasts-that-point-to-christ>

² John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck general editors; *The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO; 1983; p. 303.



“This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.”

Today we will be in John 8 with Jesus announcing the truth of this *Light*.

1. I AM

JOHN 8:12 *Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”*

The Feast of Tabernacles had just concluded which means that the giant lampstands that had been lighting the city from the temple court the past seven nights were extinguished. Jesus is speaking to the people who had been celebrating and remembering the presence and provision of God in the wilderness during the days of Moses.

Ironically, these people had just spent seven days and nights remembering, honoring, and celebrating the fact that God had tabernacled (i.e. dwelt) with His people during their darkest time of need as a nation. Yet, these people were face to face with the Son of God in their physical presence and ignored the truth looking them in the eye.

Jesus speaks, perhaps while looking around at the crowd of people, noticing they are functioning in their daily routines as if the feast had not happened; not unlike many of us the day after a holiday celebration. In this context, Jesus makes a proclamation that would be not only questionable to believe but could be interpreted as heresy. In fact, every time Jesus used the two words together, “I Am,” it could have easily been interpreted as heresy.

These two words, “I Am,” spoken together are holy. Ingrained in the minds of the Jews, the words, “I Am,” are exclusively used for the name and identity of God. From the Jewish perspective, the same God of Creation who said, “*Let there be light*” in Genesis 1:3 is the same God of Israel who told Moses in Exodus 3:14 “*I AM WHO I AM...Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’*” Throughout history, God’s people knew God, the one true God, Jehovah, Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be “I Am.”

Yet, Jesus uses those same two words seven specific times in the Gospel of John to make that connection with His Father. It was never by accident when Jesus used those two words, nor was it by coincidence. He spoke them knowing the holiness of those words. He chose to connect those words with a specific illustration as we saw last week when Jesus said, “*I Am the Bread of Life,*” following the feeding of the 5,000 men, plus women and children.

In this context, following a festival that literally and figuratively illuminated the city with giant lampstands from the courtyard of the temple, Jesus proclaims, “*I Am the Light of the world.*” It was unbridled truth that did not sit well with this particular audience.

They were religious people, active in worship, and following the Law of Moses. These are people who had participated in the Festival of Tabernacles. These were the faithful ones who would typically adhere to the teachings of the Rabbis and be influenced by the Pharisees, many were Pharisees themselves. They knew their Hebrew Bible, what we would refer to as the Old Testament. They knew the words of Moses and the prophets, the history of the judges and kings, the poetry of David and Solomon. These were not scripturally ignorant people.

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However, they were religious people experiencing the lights of the festival, though living in spiritual darkness. The penetrating words of Jesus caught them by surprise because, in appearance, He was flesh and blood. God did not appear in flesh and blood even to Moses, but rather in a burning bush that was not consumed by fire. These people could see, hear, and touch Jesus. He appeared to be just a man with the audacity to use those two holy words in referring to Himself, “*I Am.*”

2. THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

From the beginning of creation back in Genesis, God knew that light was necessary to overcome darkness. Darkness only exists with the absence of light. The only way someone can make a room dark is by doing one of three things; 1) turn a light off; 2) block out the light; or 3) choose not to turn a light on when it is already dark. Even darkness is at the mercy of light. Darkness itself has no power or authority. You cannot make a room darker by turning on the “dark.” Think about this: at night you are in your bedroom, the lights are out, the blinds are closed, and it is dark. But when the sun comes up and just barely comes through those closed blinds, it is less dark because the light has penetrated the darkness in the smallest of ways. Open the blinds fully and the light shines brightly into the room.

Jesus would utilize this metaphor several times in multiple settings explaining the need for light in a dark world. Whether it was a one-on-one dialogue with Nicodemus in the darkness of night, or a crowd of Pharisees the day following the Festival of Tabernacles, Jesus exposed the true light. The world was and is a dark place as people continue to reject Jesus Christ, the Light of the world.

The Jews were confident in the knowledge that they were the people of God. Even before Moses, there was Abraham who had a covenant with God about a nation. This nation would be a chosen people, a holy nation (*Exodus 19:5-6*). God, *I AM*, was associated exclusively with the Jewish people. God was known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the heritage of the Israelites and no other nation. God had repeatedly commanded His people to not be drawn away from Him

by intermarrying, compromising, and working with the other nations who had false gods and idols.

So not only is Jesus testing the boundaries by using the two holy words, “*I Am;*” but Jesus is also claiming to be the *Light of the world*. The concept of God being “for the world” at that time was not only an unusual concept to them, it also seemed to be in sharp contrast to how God had moved in the Old Testament exclusively with the nation of Israel.³

Jesus is claiming to be *I Am*. Jesus is saying that He is the *Light*. Jesus is telling them that He is the *Light of the world*. That includes every person from every nation who speaks every language. This was a radical statement, yet consistent with the message of Christ. The most famous and beloved of verses, John 3:16 says, “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*” This truth was mind-blowing for the Jews of the day. Jesus was saying those words to one of the top teachers of the Pharisees in the context of the darkness of the night.

John wanted to make sure the readers of this gospel understood the inclusivity of the message of Jesus Christ. John uses the word “world” 57 times in this gospel alone; it is only used 15 times in the other three synoptic gospels combined. John wanted the world to realize that God sent His

But from the beginning of creation back in Genesis, God knew that light was necessary to overcome darkness. Darkness only exists with the absence of light.

³ *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, Tyndale House 2001 p. 410.

Son because He loved the world. Jesus was the light **to the world**. Jesus was going to give His life for the world. Jesus offered His love and the gift of salvation to the world.

The Christian message has never been one of exclusivity in terms of not being for all people. Though Jesus is the only way **exclusively** to God and eternal life in heaven, (John 14:6) the salvation He provides and the light He shines is **inclusively** freely offered to the entire world.

Because of this truth, Jesus made the claim using the analogy of light. Jesus said, *“I am the Light of the world.”* It was an easy object lesson. Our world has one source of physical light, the sun. Even the brightness of the moon is completely dependent on the light from the sun. The sun provides light for all people of all backgrounds who speak all languages living in all nations of the world. There is no exclusivity to the light beaming down from the single source of the sun. The exclusivity of the single source does not diminish the inclusivity of light it provides. And for those who want to reject the light from the sun, they close doors, put up blinds and use darkening drapes in certain rooms. But none of those things actually stop the light shining from the sun. None of those actions cause the light from the sun not to be available to neighbors, friends, strangers in your neighborhood, and around the globe. It is an individual choice to reject the light of the sun. Just as it is an individual choice to reject or accept the light from God’s Son, *the Light of the world*.

The exclusivity of the single source does not diminish the inclusivity of light it provides.

The good news of the Gospel is that the life Jesus offers is for all people everywhere, regardless of age, race, finances, skill sets, language spoken, religious background, or lack thereof. And the purpose of the light is the same for every single person who chooses to let the Light in.

JOHN 8:12 *Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”*

Jesus implies a simple choice between two outcomes. A person can either walk in the darkness or have the Light of life. Notice that Jesus makes it clear that it is a free choice to follow Him. No one is forced to follow, nor is anyone prevented from following. However, the implication is also very clear; if one chooses not to follow Jesus, then the result would be walking in darkness. This statement is ultimately about abundant life, where the light covers the darkness.

3. BEYOND THE WORLD

The Pharisees respond to Jesus with the charge of false testimony. Jesus boldly replies:

JOHN 8:13-19 *So the Pharisees said to Him, “You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true.”¹⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I testify 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.¹⁵ You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone. 16 But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me. 17 Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true.¹⁸ I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.”¹⁹ So they were saying to Him, “Where is Your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also.”*

Warren Wiersbe comments on these verses,

“The Pharisees were responding to this testimony of Jesus based on the law found in Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15 as well as in Numbers 35:30, that the testimony of two men was required to validate a judgment. Jesus had those two testimonies: *He* gave witness and so did *His Father*. How tragic that these experts in the law did not even know their own Messiah as He stood before them! They claimed to know the law of God, but they did not know the God of the law.”⁴

Jesus knew the truth for He was and is the Truth (John 14:6). Jesus also adamantly proclaims in the latter part of verse 14, *“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.”* The Pharisees had no clue where Jesus had come from or where He was going. At best they would have thought of Joseph the carpenter who married Mary and raised Jesus. But the truth of this testimony was based on where Jesus truly came from and where He was truly going, His heavenly home.

Consider this description of the New Jerusalem found in Revelation 21 in view of the context of John 8:

REVELATION 21:22-23 *I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.²³ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

From the very first words spoken by God in Genesis 1:3, *“Let there be light”* to John 8 where Jesus says, *“I am the Light of the world”* to the description of heaven in Revelation 21, *“for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb,”* there has always been and will always be light. The temporary light we experience from the sun will be extinguished and no longer needed. The eternal light of heaven will be more magnificent than we can imagine. Notice the connection between God and His Son Jesus, the Lamb. Both are shining brightly. Jesus made it very clear to the Pharisees that He and His Father are connected.

JOHN 8:20-24 *These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.²¹ Then He said again to them, “I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come.”²² So the Jews were saying, “Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’”²³ And He was saying to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.²⁴ Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”*

Throughout the Gospel of John, we see that Jesus hints at the fact that He will be going away to a place that they would not be able to follow on their own. But He also makes it clear that they have a choice to believe, follow, and be forgiven. In verse 24 Jesus says, *“for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”* Jesus has planted this seed of something more than what they can see tangibly. Jesus has clearly stated the radical truth, *“I am the Light of the world.”* Jesus has said that unless you believe you will die in your sins. These are words of hope to those who believe. These are words of judgment for those who choose not to believe.

JOHN 8:25-30 *So they were saying to Him, “Who are You?” Jesus said to them, “What have I been saying to you from the beginning?²⁶ I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.”²⁷ They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father.²⁸ So Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.²⁹ And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”³⁰ As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him.*

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, New Testament*, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO; 2007, p. 257.

Their response is the exact question every person has to ask for themselves. *Who is Jesus?* This is the bottom line question of all questions. In these verses, Jesus again connects Himself with His Father. He alludes to the crucifixion in verse 28 which will be the final sacrifice for the sins of the world. But that sacrifice only makes a difference in your life if you believe in Jesus. And notice in verse 30 that is exactly what happens. The light came on, so to speak. We are not given a specific number of people, but many came to believe in Him.

***Who is Jesus?
The bottom line
question of
all questions.***

This dialogue with these Pharisees and perhaps others came after a weeklong feast and celebration remembering God's faithfulness to His people in the wilderness, reminding them of His presence by a pillar of fire which provided light. Now the Light of the World says, "*I am He.*" And just as in the beginning of creation as well as in the wilderness, light penetrates and transforms darkness.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

In our age of technology, we are very spoiled by the fact that light is so prevalent and available. Our smartphones can be adjusted to dim the brightness of the screen if it is too bright. There is a feature that literally turns the phone into a flashlight. Thanks to Thomas Edison most every home in the western world has electricity and light is available 24 hours a day. We drive cars with headlights to allow us to see along the dark roads at night. We even have the option to put our lights on timers to come on and go off at preset times.

And yet in a world filled with light, there is vast darkness. We are a culture that has turned its back on Judeo-Christian values. A society that has erased the boundaries and parameters set up for a biblical worldview. This is nothing new for our world.

JOHN 1:4-5 *In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*

The darkness of our world does not comprehend or embrace the true Light. They are blindly satisfied with the imitation and temporary light. God's plan for our lives is to provide the eternal Light that transforms the darkness of our lives through His Son, the Light of the World. God's plan becomes our purpose as we walk in the light. As John says in his epistle,

1 JOHN 1:7 *but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*