

The Light of the World

John 8:12-32

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[Bring up flashlights, candles, nightlight, lantern, spotlight, construction lights, etc.]

This little nightlight is not very bright but it gives just enough light to dispel the darkness in the middle of the night. On the other extreme, some spotlights claim to be one million times brighter than a single candle. Their light is so bright that they come with a warning to not look directly into the beam.

As we continue in our sermon series, “Metaphors of the Messiah,” we’re focusing this weekend on the second “I Am” statement of Jesus: ***“I am the Light of the World.”*** Several people told me last week’s sermon was excruciating to sit through because of the smell of fresh bread filling the room. We’ve been learning that whenever we come face-to-face with Jesus, an agonizing decision has to be made. When Jesus disrupts, some will desert Him and others will declare their allegiance to Him.

In each of these magnificent metaphors, the phrase ***“I Am”*** hearkens back to when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush. When Moses saw the “flames of fire,” he wanted to get a closer look but was told to remove his sandals because God’s presence had made the ground holy. After Moses is informed that he will lead God’s people out of Egypt, he wants to know what to say when people ask about God’s name. God answers in Exodus 3:14: ***“I AM WHO I AM.”***

“I Am” is God’s covenantal name. This title was so sacred that it was only uttered by the high priest, and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement. It literally means, *“I am who I am,”* and signals the truth that nothing else defines who God is but God Himself.

Every time Jesus uses one of the “I AM” metaphors, He is emphatically stating that He is Yahweh. This is a staggering statement of His sovereign supremacy. Just as the bush burned brightly and cast light all around, so too, Jesus is the light of the world, and a consuming fire that should stop us in our tracks because we are on holy ground. When Jesus used the phrase, “I AM” He did so on

purpose and those who heard Him did not miss the obvious connection He was making.

This riles up the Pharisees and they interrupt Jesus ten times in John 8 alone. They take umbrage at His outrageous utterances and ask Jesus a pointed question in verse 53: ***“Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?”*** Jesus pushes them further than they were intending to go when he declares in verse 56: ***“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”*** They don’t know how to respond to this scandalous statement so they turn to sarcasm in verse 57: ***“You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?”***

They’re probably chuckling to themselves at the absurdity of this statement and then they’re bowled over because Jesus isn’t finished yet. Look at verse 58: ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”*** Verse 59 tells us that they picked up stones to slay him, but Jesus slipped away.

Light Background

Please turn now to John 8:12: ***“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”*** Jesus is not saying that He is holding the light, or that He has the light, or that He’s the way to the light. [Hold up various lights]

Instead, He is unequivocally stating, “He is the light.” As we go through these Messiah Metaphors, it’s important to understand some background information. Let’s begin by looking at the properties of light.

1. Light reveals. Light enables us to see things that were there all along but because of the darkness we could not see them [Use flashlight to reveal the ugly scar on my face]. Darkness conceals and light reveals. Without light we can’t see anything. It was C.S. Lewis who said, *“I believe in Christ like I believe in the sun. Not only because I see it, but because by it all things are seen.”* Ephesians 5:13: ***“But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.”*** By the way, that’s why some people avoid coming to church. They really don’t want Christ to shine His light on the way they’ve been living.

2. Light gives life. Light is necessary for life itself. It sets our biological clocks, triggers in our brains the sensations of color, and supplies the energy for

things to grow. Have you heard of SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder)? Winter is a tough time because the sun often disappears and depression can set in. I have an extended family member who deals with this. Interestingly, only about 1% of Floridians have SAD, while 10% of Alaskans struggle with it. I'm told that one of the best treatments is using bright light therapy [turn on lantern].

In John 1:4 we read this about Jesus: ***“In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”*** While some of us struggle with Seasonal Affective Disorder, all of us have Sin Affective Disorder, which is indeed SAD, but we should be GLAD because the light of Jesus frees us from our sins.

3. Light scatters darkness. In Scripture, darkness is often a metaphor for sin, spiritual blindness, and death. John 1:5: ***“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”***

4. Light gives warmth. Did you know that one small candle, properly reflected, will raise the temperature of an igloo from below freezing to over 45 degrees? [Show construction lights and explain the heat they generate] In the Bible, warmth is often equated with the comfort of God. Ecclesiastes 11:7: ***“Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.”***

5. Light provides guidance. It's difficult to walk in the dark, isn't it? Light can help us see where we're headed. Psalms 43:3: ***“Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me.”***

Light in Scripture

Let's look now at how light is portrayed in Scripture. Those who heard Jesus declare that He is the light of the world would have had these passages running through their minds.

- Genesis 1:3-4: ***“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.”*** The first thing God created was light in order to dispel darkness.
- After God appeared to Moses and revealed His name as the “I AM,” He did an amazing thing. He turned the lights out on the Egyptians, literally. Exodus 10:21-23: ***“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a***

***darkness to be felt.**’ So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days...but all the people of Israel had light where they lived.”*

- After illuminating the Israelites with an unforgettable display of luminary brightness, God then promised to lead His people for forty years with bright light at night and a smoky cloud during the day. They never had to be afraid of the dark because the Shekinah fire of God’s holy presence was always with them. They didn’t need any night-lights [hold up] because the lights were always on! Check out Exodus 13:21: ***“And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.”*** His listeners would be shocked to realize that Jesus was equating Himself with the pillar of holy fire.
- One of the names of the coming Messiah was “light.” We see this in Daniel 2:22: ***“He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him.”***
- God Himself is referred to as light in 1 John 1:5: ***“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”*** When Jesus declares Himself to be the light of the world, He is declaring His deity.
- God’s first act was to create light and His final crescendo will be splashed with light as His work of redemption culminates. Revelation 21:23-24: ***“And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.”*** Revelation 22:5: ***“And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”***

Now let’s see the context in which Jesus made this startling claim.

1. Light in the Gospel of John. The word “light” is used 24 times in John’s gospel. In the prologue, we read in John 1:9: ***“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.”***

2. Wilderness Metaphors. As we learned last week, when Jesus declared Himself to be the bread of life in John 6, the people remembered the manna that was supplied for 40 years.

In John 7, Jesus attends the Feast of Tabernacles. Part of this celebration involved the pouring of water onto the ground, commemorating the water that came out of the rock in Numbers 17. While people are watching the water splash on the stones in the Temple, Jesus stood up and said in a loud voice in John 7:37: *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.”*

And, now in chapter 8, Jesus asserts that He is the light of the world, hearkening back to the pillar of fire that led God’s people in the desert. Jesus deliberately associated Himself with these three wilderness images in three consecutive chapters in order to establish His identity. He is the bread of life, the water of life, and the light of life.

Feast of Tabernacles

In order to fully grasp the impact of Jesus’ statement, we need to understand the Feast of Tabernacles.

God inaugurated this annual feast to help the Israelites remember that for 4 decades they wandered in the wilderness before they were finally brought into the Promised Land (see Leviticus 23:40-43). There were two distinctives about this celebration that made it different from all their other annual feasts.

1. For 7 days the entire nation camped out in booths or tents made of branches and foliage to remind them of the hardships their ancestors had endured in the wilderness.
2. On the opening night of the celebration, four gigantic candelabras standing 75 feet high were lit, gloriously illuminating the entire Temple and much of Jerusalem (this is not to be confused with the ever-burning lampstand or menorah that was in the tabernacle according to Exodus 25). Each candelabra for the Feast of Tabernacles had four branches supplied by golden bowls filled with 10 gallons of oil. These flames lept toward the sky.

Throughout the week the light burned brightly as the religious leaders praised the Lord and sang songs of joy while the people watched and waited. Musicians

played harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets. This festival was to remind the Israelites of the glory of God, dwelling among them and how God's Shekinah brightness had once filled the Temple. This celebration also focused on the promise of God to send a light, the Anointed One, the Messiah, who would deliver them from darkness and despair.

Sacrifices were offered and Scriptures like Isaiah 9:2 were read: ***“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.”***

The exquisite imagery of this celebration culminates on the final day of the feast as Jesus declares: ***“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*** We know that Jesus makes this statement on the last day from John 7:37. What's amazing about His timing is that as the celebration wraps up, all the lights are extinguished. The reason that all the lights are put out is that in their minds, God has not yet sent the Savior. The Temple has grown dark. The tents are torn down. And then Jesus stands up next to the magnificent Menorahs and declares that He is the Messiah!

One more point. John 1:14 says, ***“...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”*** Jesus “tabernacled” among us, which is exactly what they were celebrating in the feast of booths.

Application

We started broadly so that we could narrow in and understand the meaning of this metaphor. Keeping in mind the properties of light, the Scriptural survey, the context, and the background to the Feast of Tabernacles, let's now apply this verse to our lives. Here are some truths that come to light (no pun intended).

Look again at John 8:12: ***“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”***

1. Repetition. The first thing to notice is that ***“Again Jesus spoke”*** to the people. Aren't you thankful that God doesn't just give us one chance? He spoke to both the sexual sinner and the lost legalist in the same chapter and is ready to do it again and again and again. Jesus loves to give us chances. I had to hear the gospel many times before I responded. But we don't have unlimited opportunities. At some point it will be too late for you. Twice in this chapter, in

verse 21 and in verse 24, Jesus tells the Pharisees that they ***“will die in their sins.”*** I can’t think of anything more tragic than that. It’s no accident that you’re here today. This could be your last chance to put your faith in Christ.

2. Revelation. Perhaps you’re not sure if Jesus is really who He says He is. Friend, I don’t know what else you could be waiting for. What more evidence do you need? When Jesus said, ***“I am the light,”*** He is claiming to be both God and Savior. He has perfectly fulfilled the prophecy found in Isaiah 42:6-7: ***“I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”***

3. Redemption. Notice what comes next, ***“...I am the light of the world. Whoever...”*** Jesus came for the whole world. Interestingly, the word “world” occurs only 15 times in the first three gospels and 77 times alone in the Gospel of John! We must never lose sight of the importance of taking the gospel to the nations. I love that phrase, ***“whoever.”*** Anyone can come to Him. He died for the sins of everyone. No matter what you’ve done, you can be forgiven. John 12:46: ***“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.”***

At the end of the service next weekend we’re going to participate in a “global hymn sing” with thousands of churches around the world. Keith and Kristyn Getty have reintroduced a song called, “Facing a Task Unfinished” to shine the spotlight on the importance of taking the gospel to the nations. Pastor Chad and I will be talking about this on Moody Radio this Wednesday morning. I posted the song on the EBC Facebook page and have also included a link on the [Sermon Extras tab](#) on our website so you can learn it this week.

Friend, do you need to be forgiven? Don’t run away from the light! Come to the light and be forgiven. Colossians 1:13-14: ***“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”***

4. Response. Salvation is not automatic. It doesn’t work by osmosis just because you’re in church today. It’s for whoever ***“follows.”*** To follow the Lord Jesus means to believe and receive or literally, ***“to follow together along a way.”*** Have you done that yet? John 1:5 says that by nature we try to extinguish the light because it hurts our eyes. The problem with that is we will

then stumble around in the darkness of our sins. The only way to have light is to follow the light.

This past Monday night I was invited by Edgewood member Nels Lindell to speak to the brand new Fellowship of Christian Athletes group at Blackhawk College. Incidentally, I've also spoken to another Christian group on campus called, "The Conversation." Seven guys from the baseball team came and three of them responded and decided to follow Christ! Some of them are in our services this weekend. Here's a picture. The whole reason this group got off the ground is because of the prayers of Nels. These groups are shining the light of Christ in a dark place.

This gave me a renewed vision for the impact Edgewood can have on college campuses around the Quad Cities. God is doing some great things in our Ignite Singles Ministry. Last Sunday I attended their class and was really impressed with Robert Sanders' teaching and the large group discussion that focused on application. Things are also going well in our student ministry under the leadership of Chris and Jamie Rogers – over 50 students came to the Super Bowl party! I can't wait to onboard our Youth and Young Adults Pastor to bring even more focus and leadership so that we can reach more students and singles. Our search consultant will be presenting a list of candidates to the Deacons and Pastoral team this Thursday night.

5. Result. Once you respond and decide to follow Christ you ***"...will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*** This literally reads, *"He shall surely not walk in darkness."* Darkness is a metaphor for disaster, death and destruction, along with sin and its consequences. Do you see the word ***"have"***? We don't just get to see the light, we can *have* the light.

You can live in the light or despair in the dark. John 12:35: ***"So Jesus said to them, 'The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.'"***

A boy once heard his Sunday School teacher say that Jesus was the light of the world. After class, he went up to his teacher and said, *"If Jesus really is the light of the world, I wish He'd come hang out in my house. It's awfully dark where I live."*

Is it dark where you live? You can change that by embracing the light of life.

6. Repent. Have you been slipping spiritually? Have you been defaulting to the dark instead of living in the light? If so, it's time to turn the lights on. Listen to Ephesians 5:8: ***“For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light.”***

7. Reflect. One of our purposes as His followers is to shine His light in a dark world. Matthew 5:14: ***“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”*** Someone put it like this: *“I'd rather light a candle than curse the darkness.”*

Last Sunday after the service an Edgewood member was so pumped about what he learned about Jesus being the bread of life that he told his parents all about it. He then went and told a neighbor. On Monday he shared with one of his employees. He's living out our value of going with the gospel – to his family, his neighbors and to his workplace. How about you?

I heard another amazing story this week.

Kendall, a first-grader, got saved in November, and has been reading *Anchor for the Soul*. She can't put it down (By the way, we've given away around 4,000 of these gospel books and are getting ready to publish it in Spanish – several EBC members are reading the manuscript right now to check for errors).

Recently Kendall asked her mom (Kara Fitch) if she could bring the book to school so she could read it on the bus. When she started reading it, one of her friends became curious and so they started reading it together. A few days later, another friend became interested and started reading it with the other two. One day both of these girls said to Kendall, *“We want to know how to have Jesus in our lives.”* So this little 7-year-old told them. They both prayed right there on the bus and asked Jesus to save them! She came home and told her mom, *“They asked me how to get to heaven. I told them and they did it.”*

Kendall and her sister Kailey are following Christ and will be baptized soon. Their parents, Tim and Kara Fitch, are living on mission and equipping their daughters to shine the light of Jesus in our dark world.

If you're stirred by this and want to do a better job of letting your light shine, here are some *growing* and *going* ideas.

1. If you're a mom, consider going to the Hearts at Home conference in Peoria April 22-23.
2. If you're single and looking to connect with others, there's a bowling and laser tag night at the QC Entertainment Center this Saturday night.
3. If you're divorced, check out Divorce Care on Wednesday nights.
4. If you're in high school and want to learn how to let your light shine on your campus, block out April 8-9 for Dare to Share in Chicago.
5. Participate in our shoe drive for gypsy children in Romania.
6. There's an event this Saturday focusing on biblical womanhood.
7. And I want to challenge every man at Edgewood to attend the Iron Sharpens Iron Men's Conference on Saturday, April 16th at Harvest. I'm hoping for 100 men to go! Guys, we need to step it up. Former NFL quarterback Jeff Kemp and Moody grad Mark Jobe whose church in Chicago has over 20 locations, will be speaking.

1 Peter 2:9: ***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”***

Growing and Going

Let's milk this metaphor a little more as we look at some things that could be keeping us from fully shining for Christ.

1. Stop covering your light [put a box over lit lantern]. Are you doing something that is snuffing out the light of Christ in your life? Matthew 5:15-16: ***“Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”***

The whole purpose of shining our light is to give glory to God. This past Tuesday night I had the joy of presenting a check to Pregnancy Resources in the amount of \$51,555 for the Mobile Ultrasound Van. Thanks for living out your light as you gave so generously. The people at the training even stood up and applauded. I simply pointed to heaven and said, *“All glory to God.”*

2. Make sure you're plugged in [try to turn lamp on that is not plugged in]. Some of you are not shining simply because you've unplugged from your power source. You can't grow if you're not plugged into God. In addition, one of our

core values is to *gather with God's people*. Hebrews 10:25: ***“Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”***

3. Get recharged daily [hold up dim flashlight]. Is your light growing dim? The only way to burn bright is by getting recharged and rejuvenated by daily time in the Word of God. Psalm 119:105: ***“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”***

4. Use these metaphors to help you remember. Whenever you eat bread or see bread or smell bread, ask yourself this question: *“Am I finding my satisfaction by feeding on Christ?”* And when you see the light of the sun (be patient; it's coming) or when you turn on a light, ask this question: *“Am I plugged in to Christ and am I shining for Him today?”*

We're going to turn off some of the lights and ask you to come forward if you are ready to follow Jesus Christ. Have you asked Christ to be your forgiver and leader? Are you a believer but you've been doing some things in the dark? It's time to bring it into the light.

Closing Song: “The Great Light of the World.”

*Sometimes at night I am afraid
I cover my eyes,
Cover my shame
So here in the dark
Broken apart
Come with your light*