

## I AM – John 8:12-20 – The Light of the World

### I. Intro

A. There have always been questions, and we've always had options. There have always been "big questions" and we have always had multiple options as to how to answer them.

B. By "big questions" I am referring to the biggest. The worldview questions. The ones that undergird everything: Who am I? Where did I come from? What is expected of me? What happens when I die? What – or who – matters more than anything else? And where do I go to get answers to these questions.

C. And by options, I mean the various philosophies and religions that claim to be true:

1. Starting with the Greeks we had various schools of philosophy: All manner of isms: Stoicism, Hedonism, Platonism. More recently we could expand that to include: existentialism, nihilism and more.

2. When it comes to religions there have been many. For what it's worth, over the last twenty years, four have emerged as the key rivals to the Christian faith:

a) From the East it's Buddhism. Hinduism is growing and parts of it are radicalizing, but it shows no signs of leaving India. The caste system is a tough sell.

b) From the Middle East and Africa, it is Islam – which is the second largest and growing, and may overtake the Christian faith, although most of its growth has been biological (not conversion) and its biological growth rate is declining.

c) From Western Europe it is secularism – which is technically not a religion, and which is declining in sheer numbers (secular people are not marrying and having children) - but its influence is growing all the same.

d) And of course, in the US we have what Robert Bellah called Sheilism - and what some refer to as the Spiritual but Not Religious – tdh mash up of various beliefs based on individual preferences. For the last twenty years people tend to embrace an incoherent blend of Christianity and positive thinking, with some reincarnation, capitalism and whatever is hot in Hollywood at the moment, ideas all mixed together.

D. We could make this more complicated, but let's not. The point is, in contrast to all of that the Bible points to Jesus and a radically different, gloriously wonderful and generally misunderstood offer that is set before us by God – who so loved the world that He gave us His one Son. That whoever believes should not perish but have ever lasting life. We call this offer the Good News or the Gospel. And the big claim is that:

1. Jesus is - and always has been – God. At a certain point he set aside the glories of Heaven to become one of us. That is, while remaining fully God, he became fully human. We call this the incarnation.

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2. And that after arriving via a Virgin’s womb, he lived a perfect life and he taught with unrivaled wisdom and then He died a substitutionary death (that means, he took our sin upon himself and died in our place) so that we might be forgiven, reconciled to God and granted eternal life. With the understanding that as his followers, we would seek to live and love and serve and share like He did – pointing others to Him.

E. In this series we have been looking at the claims Jesus makes about himself. It’s a collection of rather odd-sounding statements. He announces that He is: *the bread of life, the good shepherd, the gate, the resurrection, the way, the truth and the life.*

F. We have looked at each of these claims in their context and noted how – although Jesus is humble in so many ways. He lives simply. He serves. He cares about others. He is not flashy. However, he keeps making these claims and they are all big.

G. In a variety of ways and in various settings he claims to be: God, eternal, the creator, the Messiah, the King of Kings – the only way forward.

H. A couple weeks ago I noted that Jesus does not claim to be another religious leader or moral reformer – but somethings far bigger than that. Indeed, while you can have Judaism without Moses and Islam without Mohammad and Buddhism without Buddha, because these men all pointed to a path – to a set of moral teachings that they said led forward. Jesus does not point to a way or to a philosophy, he points to Himself.

I. Today we look at his claim to be the Light of the World.

II. John 8 opens with his interchange with the religious leaders over the woman caught in adultery.

A. This is one of the many times they have set a trap for him. But, as always, he brilliantly dodges it. It’s never a fair fight. It reminds me of that stage of playing hide and seek with young child, where they hide by closing their eyes – thinking that if they can’t see you, you can’t see them. Or they hide in the very same spot you just hid, doing so in front of you.

B. And the first verses in John 8 are brilliant not just because of the masterful way he dismisses their efforts to pull him down, but also because of the thoughtful, loving and profound way he deals with her. He is gracious and forgiving to her even as He calls on her to sin no more.<sup>1</sup>

III. Then, in John 8:12 we read:

**A. When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”**

**B. The Pharisees challenged him, “Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.”**

1. This plays off of Jewish law. In order for something to be established in court there had to be two witnesses. They are suggesting that his claim is not admissible. Jesus knows what they are doing, but isn’t going to be sidetracked.

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- C. V14: Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.”**
- D. Then they asked him, “Where is your father?”**
- E. “You do not know me or my Father,” Jesus replied. “If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his hour had not yet come.**
- IV. This jousting match will continue and lead to the most shocking statement Jesus makes – “before Abraham was, I AM.”
- A. In saying this he was claiming the covenant name of God – which was so holy the Jews wouldn’t say it. This was the big, big, big claim he made.
- B. We looked at it in the kickoff sermon in this series.
- C. Today we are focusing on verse 12: Jesus says, I am the Light of the World.
- V. Here we have yet another metaphor. This time, light. It stands alongside the others: bread, a gate, a shepherd. Each of these metaphors is rich, but light might be the richest.
- A. Science: As we have learned more about light the claim Jesus makes has gotten bigger. We now know: 1) that light is the source of life. Without the sun, there would be no life on earth; and 2) we now know that without light people get depressed; 3) And yet, so strong, we know that for all the good it does, unmediated light is too much. It will cause cancer or make you go blind;<sup>2</sup> 4) mysterious - it’s both a wave and a particle.
- B. Literature: don’t have to play the scientist here to see the power of what Jesus is saying. We know it from everyday life.
1. Light is a source of illumination. It reveals. It helps us see things that want to remain hidden.
  2. The darkness can be bad – or frightening. Children are often scared of the dark.
  3. Things that happen at night – or after dark – often have some less than honorable. qualities about them.
  4. We do not have to be told that the term “Dark Ages” was coined to say this was a bad time. Or that the “Age of Enlightenment” is a term for a better time.
- C. Of course, the key place to go for insight about Christ’s comments about light is the Bible, where it shows up in all kinds of ways.

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1. Not only is one of the first things God does in Genesis to create light – separating it from the darkness, but we see light being a big theme whenever God shows up.
2. When Jesus starts his public ministry, the first sermon he preaches is from Isaiah 61. He claims the book is about him – that he is the light the people walking in darkness see.
3. When he appears to Saul on the Damascus road, he does so as a blinding light.
4. During his Transfiguration – where he allows a few of his disciples to see his true nature - he is so brilliant his clothes glow.
5. In John he is associated with light several times. 1) John 1 opens: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it; 2) Later we read that John the Baptist was sent “to bear witness to the light.” 3) In the Book of Revelation – which was written by John - he will note that in heaven there is no sun nor any shadows, because the light of Jesus lights up the whole place.

- VI. There is a lot here. Unpacking the magnitude of the metaphor helps us understand the magnitude of the claim. But we also get that from today’s text.
- A. In John 8:20 states that after Jesus said he was the light of the world, the Pharisees “didn’t kill Him.” Why does John mention this? Because he knows something we don’t. He knows how the Pharisees heard this statement.
  - B. You see, Jesus claims to be the light of the world in Jerusalem on the last night of the Feast of the Tabernacles - which is also called the Feast of Booths and the Feast of Shelters. It is one of three religious events Jewish males were supposed to make the trek back to Jerusalem for. It was both a celebration of the harvest and a time to remember God’s provision for Israel during the 40 years in the wilderness.
    1. In Exodus 13 we read that God led them during that time as a pillar of cloud during the day – which speaks both of shade and of glory. But for us the important part is next, we are told that he was a fire providing light at night.
  - C. God manifested his presence as light. During the celebration of the Feast of the Tabernacles, they would have a giant candelabra – a candle holder with seven candles - in the Temple except on the last night when as a sort of cold, despairing reminder that the glory of God had departed – as Ezekiel had witnessed – they removed the candelabra.

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D. The point being, it was on the last night – John 7:37 notes that on the last night of the festival, when the candelabra is out - that Jesus says, “I am the light of the world!” You do not need the candle. I am the glory light! I am that which you are longing for! I am the near presence of God! I’m not a prophet who points to the glory of God, or some guru who talks about the glory of God, I am the glory of God. I am the light of God. I am the way God’s light enters your life!”

E. Jesus is anticipating the end of the Temple and the end of the law, and He is saying, “let them go. They do not matter, I do.” He is declaring that, “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

F. The point being, just as Israel followed the pillar of fire in the wilderness, we are to follow the light of Christ.

VII. Which is the second part of this verse – and it is also a bit shocking. Bold.

A. In addition to the magnitude of the claim - I am the Light of the World – you have Jesus saying, “so you better follow me.” Alongside his claims to be God and truth and the path forward, he says: by my disciple. Live your life in line with my call. My teachings. My demands. Live for me.

B. Get out of the darkness and become my apprentice.

C. Start living a life of consistency and integrity.

1. Some of you are doing things in the dark. Some of you are hiding things from your spouse or your friends or yourself.

2. Remember, the darkness is temporary. Jesus sees everything, and someday the light will come up. The Bible tells us that everything will be revealed. And even in this life, things come out.

3. Realize that God’s light is shining here. Live lives of integrity. Do not be different in the dark then you are in the light. Don’t be different when no one is looking. Be a person of integrity.

D. To the Christians here I would say, we are to be lights in the world. We are to reflect His light in the way we think and live. This will not always be easy because not everyone likes the light.

E. To those of you who have not yet decided what to do with Jesus, I say: sign up. Accept. Receive.

1. If you’re starting to feel that Jesus is more than a good moral teacher, this is a sign that the light is beginning to enter your life.

2. If the claims of Jesus are starting to make you mad, or scared, or filled with love, this is a sign that the light is at work. It’s indifference that is the absence of light. Indifference shows that you haven’t even begun to listen to the radical nature of the claims of Christ.

3. How do you become a Christian?

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- a) Charles Spurgeon was saved when he walked into a tiny church with only one congregant in attendance. The sermon was given by an elder, who wasn't a preacher. In his 15 minute sermon, the elder simply repeated the text from Isaiah that says: "Look to me and be saved all ye ends of the earth." The elder said "Don't you see! You don't have to do anything! You don't have to go anywhere! You just have to look and see what he has done for you!"
- b) When the elder finished, he looked at Spurgeon and said, "Young man, I see that you're miserable, and you're going to stay miserable until you obey my text." Spurgeon had for a year been trying to figure out spiritual reality. He tried moralism. He swore off this vice and that vice. When that didn't work, he went into mysticism. But when this elder said, "obey my text," it dawned on him that there's nothing he had to do except accept what Christ had done for him.
- c) Some of you today are miserable and you're going to stay miserable until you obey this text, "Look to me and be saved all ye ends of the earth."

- VIII. At the beginning of this sermon, I said you had options. I noted that there are competing truth claims – various philosophies, worldviews, religions all competing for followers.
  - A. I also noted that although Jesus is humble – and lives simply – he is not modest. He makes big claims. Over and over and over again. Today we just looked at another one.
  - B. Please note: His claims are not subtle. Nor is his advice about next steps. If you want to follow Jesus, it is on his terms. He calls on us to repent, accept and receive.
  - C. You have options to do that or not. But let me be clear:
    - 1. They do not extend forever.
    - 2. And they do not allow you to pick and choose the aspects of Jesus you like and dismiss the others.
  - D.
- IX. Communion.

<sup>1</sup> There is some suggestion that Jesus leverages her sin "in the darkness" to talk about light.

<sup>2</sup> This list of observations about Light is from Tim Keller's sermon on John 8:12-20.