

I am...the Light of the World (John 8:12)

Reading: John 1:1-9; 8:12-30

This was the 2nd time Jesus invoked the sacred name of God and applied it to himself.
The second of the seven great “I am” statements of Jesus.

Today, Jesus claims “I am the light of the world.” (John 8:12).

This isn't the first time in John's Gospel that Jesus is described as the light of the world.
In the opening chapter of John, the apostle wrote,

“In Him [Jesus] was life, and the life was the light of men” (1:4).

John went on to speak of Jesus as the light in that chapter six times.

In the third chapter of his Gospel John makes a similar reference when he writes, *“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (3:19).*

And he makes a reference to light 5x more.

In each of these cases, it is the apostle John who describes Jesus in terms of light.

Now, where in the world did he get this notion that Jesus was the light of the world?
He got it from the Lord Himself when he boldly proclaimed, *“I am the light of the world.”*

If we are to understand the full impact of Jesus' words here, it is important to understand the context in which He spoke them.

When we think of the phrase “the light of the world,” we naturally think of the sun.

It is the sun which gives light to our physical world.

But this is not the image Jesus is using in John 8.

Jesus said “I am the light of the world” shortly after the Feast of Tabernacles had taken place.

The feast of tabernacles was one of the 3 great pilgrimage festivals of the Jewish year.

The Feast lasted seven days, from the 15th to the 22nd of the seventh month.

It was a time of great rejoicing.

Every Jewish male was required to attend.

Jerusalem was packed.

But there was plenty of room at the hotels.

That's because everybody went camping,
living out of doors in homemade tents,

put together from the branches of palm trees.

This was to remind everyone of the Exodus and the way their forefathers had wandered through the desert for forty years.

In the Temple special sacrifices were offered on each of the seven days, reaching a climax on the last day, the great day of the feast, when the people could leave their booths for the final celebrations.

To make this celebration possible, each night huge candelabra were erected in the Court of the Women to provide illumination for the whole Temple area, and the surrounding galleries packed with pilgrims.

They were very large, the height of the Temple walls. The Temple itself was built on the highest point in the city of Jerusalem, so these lamps were said to have cast their light over every quarter of the city of Jerusalem.

All night long the people danced before the Lord singing psalms of joy and praise while the Levites played harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets, and other instruments of music.

It was some party.... Imagine the scene, the night sky dark, the Temple brightly lit by the flames, the Court area packed with pilgrims, and priests.

But the flaming candelabra were not simply lit so that the party could go on all night. The light was a powerful symbol.

A symbol of the Shekinah, the glory of God, seen as a "*pillar of fire at night*" that appeared on the day when the Israelites left Egypt, and it guided them throughout their journeys in the desert for 40 years until they reached the Promised Land.

It gave them shade by day and light and warmth at night.

When Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world,*" He was making a clear reference to these lamps and what they symbolized.

That is what made Jesus declaration so controversial.

Jesus was making the audacious claim to be nothing less than God.

The one who had led His people through the desert, the one they had longed for had now arrived.

Jesus was claiming to be greater than all other religious leaders.

He was not simply a prophet to the Jews.

He was claiming to be God!

A natural question that arises is what did Jesus mean by claiming to be the light of the world?

There are many parallels to physical light which I think give us insight into this saying of Jesus.

For example, one of the purposes of light is to show a way out of the darkness. Light serves as a guide. It points the way one should go.

Light also dispels the darkness and exposes the true reality of things.

How many times have we been fearful wandering around in the darkness until we finally we locate a light switch or turn on a torch and find great comfort and relief in being able to see our surroundings? Christ does that for us as the light of the world.

Light reveals truth...It reveals truth about ourselves.

We never see ourselves truly until we see ourselves in the context of Christ.

Sometimes it is hard to admit some of our imperfections, but when we compare ourselves to Christ and his Word we are confronted with our true selves.

We are sinners in need of a Savior. It takes a good deal of humility to receive the light.

The light also reveals the truth concerning the way of salvation.

John 8:12 says, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

However, I think that by making reference to the two pillars of cloud and fire in Israel's history, Jesus also claimed for Himself at least three other things.

These two great lamps that shone during the Feast of Tabernacles symbolized the presence of God, the protection of God, and the guidance of God.

Let's consider each of these briefly.

The Presence of God.

In the biblical record of the book of Exodus, we read that the pillars which guided the people of Israel marked the presence of God in a dramatic way.

We read of the way in which God spoke from the cloud and that sometimes He broke from the cloud in judgment upon the sins of the people (Ex. 13:21,22).

At no time during their wandering in the wilderness did the people of Israel forget that the presence of God was with them every step of the way.

Jesus as the light of the world assures us of the presence of God, too.

He is our constant companion throughout our lives.

He is the unseen guest of every meal, the unseen listener to every conversation.

Christ promised His disciples that He would never leave them or forsake them, and He is true to His word.

No matter how alone you may feel today, no matter how many people have let you down and abandoned you, Christ is there right by your side.

He is never so near as when we need Him the most and He's only a prayer away.

As the light of the world, Jesus assures us of *God's presence*.

The Protection of God.

The cloud was important to the people of Israel because it was a primary means by which God protected His people.

We read in Exodus that when the Israelites were fleeing Egypt, Pharaoh had a change of heart and decided to pursue them...to get them back.

However, just as the king of Egypt and his army were closing in on the people of Israel, the pillar of cloud which had been leading them to the Red Sea moved from a position in front of them to the rear and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel (Ex. 14:20).

Throughout the night, as the people crossed through the Red Sea, the cloud brought darkness to the Egyptians but light to the Israelites so that neither side came near the other all night long.

When the Israelites had crossed to the other side, God lifted the cloud, released the waters He had parted, and Pharaoh and his army were crushed by the wind and the waves.

Jesus, the light of the world, is our protection, too.

He is the sovereign God of the universe.

He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

There is nothing that can touch you in this life that doesn't first pass through the hands of Jesus.

Are you fearful of the future?

Are you apprehensive about the results of a recent medical test?

Is there an enemy who seems larger than life and you wonder how you are going to make it?

Remember that Jesus is the light of the world, and He is your protection.

Look to Jesus to be your defender.

The Guidance of God.

The lamps also represented God's guidance for the people of Israel while they were in the desert.

The people could not recognize any of the landmarks,
and they didn't have a clear idea about which way to go.

In addition, out in the desert things can get confusing.

The heat produces mirages, it distorts distances, and confuses.

In this environment God provided the cloud and the fire.

When the cloud moved, the people followed.

When the cloud stood still, they remained where they were (Num. 9:18).

As the light of the world, Jesus is our guide.

Not only can He show us the way out of the darkness, but we should also seek His counsel whenever we have a major decision to make as we walk in the light.

We should earnestly pray that Christ would show us which way we are to go when we are making plans for the future.

God loves us, and He has our best interest at heart.

There is no better place to live than in the center of God's will.

Our Response

We can hear the words of Jesus, where he calls himself the light.

We can know the wonderful effects of that light.

But a response is called for from each of us.

Notice what Jesus says, "*I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness*" (John 8:12).

“Whoever follows me”.

Jesus is not talking about an intellectual decision but a pattern of behavior.

“Follows me”.

How do we follow Jesus?

By obeying his word. By walking in his footsteps.

We follow.

Jesus not only says, "I am the Light of the world," but to the Christian he says, "You are the light of the world... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"(Mt. 5:14-15).

How is it that we can be what Jesus Himself was?

Amazingly, Jesus shines through us to the world.

Our light is a derived light.

It is an indirect light.

The light we have isn't from ourselves, but from God.

Ours is a borrowed light.

It is derived from another source.

Think of the sun and the moon.

The moon has no light of its own; it simply reflects the radiant light of the sun.

Sometimes we are a crescent moon, and sometimes we are a full moon.

Sometimes we are an eclipsed moon, and we must remember that if anything is standing in the way between us and God, we will not reflect His light.

Jesus is the source of our light, and it comes to us only by His grace.

We are light reflectors of Jesus who did all we have described, and so much more.

In an apartment district in New York City, a boy in ragged clothes was seen with a small piece of broken mirror in his hand.

Holding it high in the air he moved it slowly back and forth, watching the narrow slit of a window above him as he did so.

"What are you doing?" a man suddenly demanded as he shook the youngster roughly by the shoulder. "Like most boys in this neighborhood, you're probably up to some mischief, aren't you?"

The boy looked up into the stern face of his accuser and said, "See that window up there? Well, I have a little brother who has a room on that floor. He's a cripple. The only sunlight he ever sees is what I shine up to him with my mirror!"

Jesus is the light of the world.

If we follow Him, if we walk in the Sonlight, then we are reflectors of His light.

We are to reflect the light of The Son so that someone in darkness may see.

I am talking here about Missions, Evangelism, Outreach, and Witnessing.

So we live like Jesus, we fight the battles with darkness.

We bring truth to the blind and ignorant.

We bring hope to those burdened by sin.

We bring acceptance to the forgotten and unloved.

To those confused about life, we bring God's word.

To the sad, we bring joy.

To the impatient, we bring a reason to be calm.

By word and deed we are to reflect the light of Jesus into the lives of friends, neighbors, co-workers, and fellow students who live and walk in darkness.

But do we?

Conclusion

The simplicity of Jesus is refreshing.

No qualification, no fudging. His promise is crystal clear.

And the choice is infuriatingly either/or.

There's no in between, no neutrality.

We either walk in the light with Christ or we walk in the darkness without him.

We are all walking in one of two directions – life or death - leading to one of two destinies - heaven or hell.

Let the enormity of this promise sink in, "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)

Let me ask you:

Do you follow Jesus?

Is yours a life of light?

Do you reflect the light of Christ?