

I AM the Light of the World

John 8:12

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on June 10, 2012

Introduction

- ❖ **“A blind man knows he cannot see, and is glad to be led, though it be by a dog.”**¹ I like that quote because it emphasizes the humbling effect of coming to realize you’re blind. Think about it: A seeing person would consider it quite useless and rather embarrassing to be led around a room by a dog – to have a dog walk you, in a sense.
 - But a blind man, on the other hand, has come to the point where he’s swallowed his pride and is more than willing to be ushered around, be it by a dog. He’s *glad* to be led since he knows otherwise he’s lost. He’s completely in the dark.

- ❖ The same principle holds true in the spiritual realm. People who think they have, within themselves, a sense of spiritual sight – spiritual understanding apart from divine revelation – (these individuals) will probably consider it useless and embarrassing to follow after God. To them it *would* be like following after a dog. They think they already know the way to a life of great significance and abounding joy. Why would they need a guide?
 - But those who acknowledge their spiritual blindness – who recognize in their lives a profound sense of lostness – (these individuals) are glad to be led and taken to the very source of life, significance, and joy. Even if it’s by a dog.
 - But thankfully the Christian doesn't have to settle for a dog. We have a far greater guide. A guide who is far more loyal, far more dependable. Of whom we have no reason to be ashamed, no reason to be afraid. **Though we be lost and blind in and of ourselves, we have a Great Savior who leads us through life’s dark storm, who pilots us over life’s tempestuous sea.**

- ❖ *Do you know this Great Savior, this Great Guide? Are you following Him? Some of you may still be wondering if that’s even necessary. “Do I really need to follow a Guide? Am I really lost? I don’t feel lost. I feel like I know where I’m going in life.”* To you, I ask that you allow Scripture to shine a bright spotlight on you this morning, so that you better see the gravity of your condition and the greatness of this promised Guide.
 - **On the other hand, some of you know you’re lost.** You don’t know where you’re going in life. You’ve come to realize you don’t know the way. So you’re ready to follow. You want to know more about this Guide and where he’s going to take you. Many of you have already begun this journey of following, and for you I pray that his Light would shine clearer and brighter in and through you, so that others would be drawn to the same Light and join you on the way towards Life.

- ❖ In **chapter 8:12** of John’s Gospel, Jesus makes his second “I AM” statement. He boldly proclaims, *“I am the light of the world.”* Last week we saw Jesus claim, *“I am the bread of life.”* (6:35) He does this five more times in this Gospel. And in each of his seven statements, he is doing two things. **1) He’s self-identifying with Yahweh God of the Old Testament, and 2) He’s describing a particular attribute that he manifests in himself as God Incarnate – in this case, he claims to possess and emit divine light.**

¹ Samuel Butler, 17th century British poet and satirist

- ❖ Jesus accomplishes the first by using, in his statement, the particular Greek phrase *ego eimi*, which is translated “*I am*”. In those two little words we hear a clear echo of God’s self-definition in **Exodus 3:14**, where he instructs Moses to tell the Israelites that “**I AM WHO I AM**” has sent him. **It’s widely held that Jesus intended to import the divine significance of those two little words into his seven statements.** He spoke carefully and purposefully with the intent of revealing his oneness with Yahweh God.
 - In fact he does it three more times in chapter 8. In v24 he says, “*For unless you believe that I AM (the “he” is added) you will die in your sins.*” In v28, “*When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM (again the “he” is added).*” And in v58 (the clearest example), “*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.*”
 - In John’s Gospel, each utterance of *ego eimi* out of the mouth of Jesus is a self-disclosure of his unique relationship with God the Father.
- ❖ **So with the understanding that Jesus is claiming divine status with these I AM statements, our goal this morning is to determine what he means in this particular statement by calling himself the Light of the World.** We’ll focus primarily on v12 itself but we’ll consider the context of vv12-20.
 - In your outline, I ask the question, “*What does it mean for Jesus to be the Light of the World?*”. There are three answers to that: 1) It means he’s the Light that guides the lost, 2) the Light that exposes the lost, and 3) the Light that transforms the lost.

The Light that Guides the Lost

- ❖ Consider our first point. For Jesus to be the Light of the World means **1) He is the Light that guides the lost who are wandering in a darkened world, much like a flashlight guides you when you’re lost in the dark.**
 - I believe this was Jesus’ intent in calling himself the Light. **He was emphasizing his function as a Great Guiding Light for the lost.** I have two reasons.
- ❖ **First**, after making this claim to be the Light, Jesus immediately speaks of those who follow him. He expects people to follow him. That’s what a guide does. He has people follow him from one destination to another.
 - **Second**, and more convincing, when we consider the context *when* and *where* Jesus applies this metaphor of Light to himself, it becomes clear that he sees himself fulfilling the OT hope that God would once more be for his people a Great Guide.
 - Now “where” is given to us in v20. Jesus is in the treasury of the temple in Jerusalem, which was located in what was known as the Court of Women. This detail will be relevant in a moment.
- ❖ Now we know “when” Jesus made this I AM statement by looking back to chapter 7. The events there precede the discourse Jesus has with the Pharisees recorded here in chapter 8. So in chapter 7:2 we’re told all this took place during the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles), which was a week-long celebration in September or October during the harvest season.

- ❖ This was one of the more popular feasts observed by first-century Jews. Pilgrims to the Holy City would construct temporary leafy shelters and reside in them during that week. Hence the name “***Feast of Booths***”. It was intended to recall to mind ancient Israel’s wilderness wandering where, for forty years, they resided in similar shelters. **The main point was to remember God’s faithful provision during that time and to praise him for his continued provision in their present-day lives.**
- ❖ Now there were two particular ceremonies that took place during the Feast. One was a **water-pouring ceremony** performed daily in the temple as a means of giving thanks to God for the rainfall needed for the harvest. But it also symbolized God’s provision of water to the Israelites during the wilderness years. The ceremony consisted of priests drawing water from the Pool of Siloam and pouring it out at the base of the altar.
 - With that in mind, notice in **chapter 7:37** it says, “*On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’*”
 - It’s no stretch of the imagination to picture Jesus saying these words as the water-pouring ceremony just wrapped up for the day. “*As Yahweh provided water to your forefathers, I provide living water to those who come to me.*”
- ❖ The second event that took place each night of the Feast was a **light ceremony**. Four enormous candlesticks would be lit by the priests while people danced and sang. It was said that the light radiating from the temple grounds, which stood atop a hill, shone a glow all over the entire city.
 - Now interestingly enough, these four lamp stands were located – guess where – in the Court of Women where the treasury was located. That means Jesus likely spoke these words, “*I am the light of the world*”, while standing under these enormous lamps as they shone light into the darkness of the city.
 - Now just as the water ceremony recalled Israel’s days in the wilderness, the light in this ceremony was said to symbolize the Pillar of Light that acted as a guide throughout those forty years (cf. Ex. 13:21). And we’re told in Exodus that the Pillar actually represented the presence of God himself.
- ❖ So by claiming to provide living water and to be the light, all in the context of this Feast with Old Testament allusions in the background, it’s clear that Jesus is identifying with the God of Israel. **By calling himself the Light, he is recapitulating God’s role and function as Israel’s Great Guiding Light, who led them out of the wilderness into the promise land.**
- ❖ But notice that he doesn’t call himself the light of Israel. He’s the light of the world. He’s taking the Pillar of Light imagery and applying it to all the nations of the world. **In other words, Jesus is not just Israel’s Light. He is the Great Guiding Light for the entire world.**

- **That means there is no other Light out there for other people of other nations or other religions to follow after.** There is no other Guide who actually brings you out of darkness and into the light. All other supposed guides lead you nowhere. Yes, Jesus is saying that he *alone* reveals and guides the way to the Father of Lights (Jas. 1:17).
- ❖ The exclusivity of his claim to be THE Light is not lost on the Pharisees. In the following verse, v13, they question Jesus' authority to make such claims. They assume he's making baseless claims with no authority to back it up.
 - So in vv14-19, Jesus' point is that he speaks with the authority of his Father, God the Father. And in v19, he affirms his oneness with the Father, saying, "*If you knew me, you would know my Father also.*" Two chapters later he comes right out and says, "*I and the Father are one.*" (10:30)
- ❖ **I realize that in our global community, it's commonly argued no one religion or religious leader can claim a monopoly on light.** All religions have some light to share with humanity as a whole. And most would agree that Jesus has much light to offer, maybe more so than any other. But his light is not exclusive. Other teachers of other world religions should speak and share their light as well.
- ❖ Now while Christians can appreciate a call for religious tolerance if by "tolerance" we mean a willingness to civilly listen and learn from people of all faiths. But if by "tolerance" we mean a flattening of all religious truth claims, then Christians must respectfully disagree.
 - **Jesus stands alone as the only Guiding Light who can lead the lost out of darkness into the presence of the Father of Lights.** Later in chapter 14, he explicitly says, "*I AM the Way ... No one comes to the Father except through me.*" (v6).
- ❖ But even here, in v12, in calling himself the Light of the World, Jesus is implying that he stands alone. That he is the only Light capable of delivering all who are lost in the world.
 - **Does this offend you?** Well imagine you live in a harbor town that is home to a Great Lighthouse that has safely guided vessels to harbor from the beginning. Now if you believe yourself to be safely moored in the harbor, then you might have the leisure and occasion to enter into philosophical debates about whether or not the Great Lighthouse is really *the* light or whether other lesser lights are just as effective.
- ❖ But if you come to the realization that you're actually lost at sea, being tossed about in darkness of a storm, I'll bet you won't have much concern for philosophical debates. You don't have the leisure. No, you're straining and searching with all your might for a glimpse of that shining glimmer emanating from the Great Lighthouse.
 - **When you know you're lost in the dark and in need of rescue, you welcome Jesus' words.** You're not offended. No, you're exceedingly grateful to see the shining glimmer emanating from the Light of the World.

The Light that Exposes the Lost

- ❖ So the question then is whether you see yourself as lost at sea OR safely moored in the harbor. This leads us to our second point. In claiming to be the Light of the World, Jesus means that **2) He is the Light that exposes and confronts us with our lost condition.**
- ❖ Have you ever taken a black light and shone it all around your room? On your floor, in your closet, on your clothes, over your bedding, on your pillow? I don't advise it. You might end up buying new clothes and new bedding. You might end up moving to a new room. There are some stains best left hidden and unseen.
- ❖ But unfortunately, some would feel the same way when it comes to the stain of sin. In fact, that would be the natural instinct for every one of us. **When it comes to our sin – especially the sins we commit in thought or in private – we instinctively prefer they stay hidden from public consciousness, sometimes even from self-consciousness.** In other words, we would rather remain blind to our sinfulness. We don't want to know how bad off we really are. We'd rather be left in the dark.
- ❖ Jesus taught something similar in **chapter 3:19-20**. There he said, *“The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.”*
 - In other words, just as rats and roaches prefer the dark (they love the dark corners of your attic) and will scatter if you turn on the light, humans are really no different. **If you're convinced that you're a cute squirrel or a pretty ladybug, then you're going to run from any light that exposes you to really be just a rat or a roach in disguise.** In fact, you're going to hate that light. You're going to want to get rid of it. You might even pick up a stone to throw at it. That's what the Pharisees tried.
- ❖ I'm convinced this one of the primary reasons why people reject the Christian faith. I'm sure intellectual objections have something to do with it. The hypocritical lives of Christians they know probably has something to do with it. **But deep down people reject the faith because it's personally offensive. Jesus is offensive.** He comes and shines a big black light over your entire life and exposes every stain, every blemish, and every fault.
 - He comes and says things like, *“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.”* (Jn. 12:46) That you *may not remain* in darkness! **The assumption is that our native state, our natural condition, is darkness. Jesus is teaching that everybody – apart from believing in him – is lost and wandering about in darkness.**
 - If you read on in chapter 8, Jesus goes on to tell the Jews that they are slaves to sin (8:34) and children of the devil (8:44). Like I said, Jesus is offensive.

- ❖ **And most offensive of all, Jesus comes, takes up his cross and says *this ugly cross is the only way your sins can be forgiven*.** You are that bad off. Your sins are so sinful, so vile, the only way to reconcile you to God is for me to be nailed to this horrible, cruel, brutal cross.
 - No amount of charity, selflessness, compassion for others, good deeds done with good motives could atone for your sins. If there was another option, don't you think the Father who dearly loves the Son would've taken it? But the cross was the only option because we are just that lost without him.

- ❖ **I think it's ironic that the very event that speaks forgiveness for sin is the very event that speaks an indictment against sin.** The cross of Christ shines forth a light of great hope AND of great conviction, exposing us as lost sinners in desperate need of that very hope.

- ❖ Recall that popular passage out of **Isaiah 9** that prophesied the birth of Christ. We usually read it during Christmas. It starts like this, "*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.*" (Isa. 9:2)
 - Jesus came to shine a great light on those living in deep darkness, and once you see it, you're confronted with a choice. Either **a)** Scatter like a rat or roach and remain in darkness, or **b)** Submit to the light, come out of darkness, and follow where it leads.

- ❖ **In a sense, Jesus has come to separate people just as God separated light from darkness on the first day of creation.** There is no doubt that John sees Jesus as performing a new creation. That's why he starts off his gospel identically with Genesis 1:1 ("*In the beginning, God*"). He writes, "*In the beginning was the Word*" (Jn. 1:1). **Jesus is making a new creation – a new humanity, sons and daughters of light (Jn. 12:36).**
 - But let me be clear. This is not a separation between really holy people who have gotten their act together, called Christians, on one side. And a whole bunch of sinful people who don't seem to measure up on the other side.

- ❖ **No, we're talking about a separation between a mass of equally blind, equally lost individuals in the dark.** Now some have shut their eyes even tighter and, at least for now, seem content to remain in the dark. But others have had their eyes opened, their hearts changed, and they've come out of the darkness. These are the sons and daughters of light – children of the Great Father of Lights.

The Light that Transforms the Lost

- ❖ This leads to our third and final point. In describing himself as the Light of the World, Jesus also means that **3) He is the Light that transforms the lost.** That means not only does he lead them out of darkness, Jesus changes them from children of darkness to children of light.
 - Jesus says in v12 that if you follow him, you'll no longer walk in darkness, but now you'll have the "*light of life*". **I take that to mean you'll now have the Light that creates life, that gives life.** Just think of sunlight. Sunlight is necessary for life to exist. It imparts life to every living thing. **In the same way, the Light of the World imparts new life to those dead in their transgressions.**

- ❖ In **chapter 12:36** Jesus makes this point as clear as can be. There he said, “*While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.*” **He transforms children of darkness into children of light.**
- ❖ In John’s Prologue, in **chapter 1:4**, we read, “*In [Jesus] was life, and the life was the light of men.*” Jesus, being in very nature God, has life in himself, and he imparts this life to men (to humanity). “*To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*” (Jn. 1:12)
- ❖ So in other words, if you step out of the darkness and follow the Light, if you receive him, if you believe in his name, Jesus imparts new life to you. You’re transformed from a child of the devil to a child of God.
 - Or as the Apostle Paul puts it in **Colossians 1**, God delivers us from the domain of darkness and transfers us to the kingdom of his beloved Son (Col. 1:13). He’s talking about the kingdom of light. We’ve been welcomed in, adopted as children of the Great King of Light, to share in the inheritance of the saints in light (Col. 1:12).
- ❖ So here is the point I’m trying to get at: **If you are a citizen of the kingdom of light, then you have a particular duty, a particular calling, to fulfill as sons and daughters of light.**
 - After his resurrection, prior to his ascension, Jesus gathered his disciples and told them, “*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*” (Jn. 20:21) So as the Father sent him to be the Light of the World, even so Jesus is sending us, his disciples, to be the light of the world.
- ❖ In **Matthew 5:14**, Jesus says to his disciples, “***You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.***” It’s fascinating that Jesus actually calls *us* the light of the world. Then he compares us to a city on a hill.
 - Just picture that city, so high and visible that you can’t miss it. Lost travelers can fix their eyes on the city, though it be way off in the distance, and still be guided home.
- ❖ So just as Jesus was sent into this world to be a Great Guiding Light for the lost, even so we’re being sent into our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our schools, our homes, as guiding lights with the aim of helping the lost come out of darkness and into the kingdom of the Father of Lights.
 - Brothers and sisters, fellow sons and daughters of light, “*Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*” (Mt. 5:15)
 - “*Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.*” (Phil. 2:14-15)