

Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live
(The Gospel of John: Signs of the Messiah - 1:1-12:50)
John 8:12-30
The Light of the World

There are few things more necessary than light. How many of you keep a flashlight ready in the house in case you lose power? How many children go to sleep with a nightlight, because the darkness is “just too scary?” What would happen if suddenly the light of the sun dimmed or went out? Indeed the whole universe is ablaze with light. **In July 2010, Paul Crowther, professor of astrophysics at the University of Sheffield, announced that he and his research team had discovered a star they described as the brightest star ever found in the universe. Not even a welder's helmet would help you face the light from this giant. The mass of the star is roughly 265 times that of our sun. But that's nothing. The brightness of this star is some 10 million times greater than the light coming from our sun!** Think about that! The dazzling brilliance of this star gives us a sense of our God who lives in unapproachable light, which no one has seen or can see. So there is certainly something very significant about light.

As Jesus begins to address the Jews during the Feast of Tabernacles, he grabs the attention of everyone when he declares to them: “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” (John 8:12) But what exactly was he saying? To his audience, they would have immediately associated light with God’s presence. God created light on the first day and lights on the fourth day (Genesis 1:3, 14-19). God had revealed himself in a flaming bush to Moses in the Midianite desert. He had protected the Israelites through the wilderness in a cloudy pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22; 14:19-25; Numbers 9:15-23), and he appeared to them on Mount Sinai in fire. Further, every day of the feast, the daily water pouring ceremony had its nightly counterpart in a lamp lighting ceremony. Where Jesus was speaking, four huge candelabras were lit, creating a light so brilliant that there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect their light. The people would dance

exuberantly around the candelabra through the night, holding blazing torches in their hands and singing songs of praise. It is against this backdrop that Jesus makes his stunning announcement that he is the true Light of the world. Further, in contrast to these brilliant candelabras, he is a light that will never go out, and a light, like the pillar of fire in the wilderness, to be followed.

Jesus's teaching throughout the Feast of Tabernacles has been developing a "wilderness theme." He is the Bread of life, just like the manna from heaven during Israel's wandering in the wilderness.. He is the Living water, just as the water gushed out of the rock in the wilderness. And just like the blazing fiery pillar above the tabernacle, he is their Light in a dark world. What then is Jesus trying to say to them and also saying to us? I believe that Jesus uses the analogy of light, because light reveals things. Jesus "sheds light" on a number of subjects. **Indeed we are going to discover three things that Jesus reveals to us as the Light of the World.**

I. Jesus Reveals the Way to Salvation (8:12)

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Jesus brings the light of salvation into a sin cursed world. He is the "Servant of the Lord" that Isaiah predicted would be a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 49:6). To those who trust in Christ alone for their salvation and follow him as Lord, he is the light of truth that pierces the darkness of falsehood. He is the light of wisdom that dispels the darkness of ignorance. He is the light of holiness that reveals the darkness of sin. He is the light of joy that lifts the heavy burdens of the darkness of sorrow. And even when the darkness of death knocks at our door, he is the light of life that will one day raise us from the dead.

II. Jesus Reveals the Darkness of Unbelief (8:13-19)

¹³ *So the Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true."* ¹⁴ *Jesus answered, "Even if I do bear witness 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 judge no one.*

¹⁶ *Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who*

judge, but I and the Father who sent me.¹⁷ In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true.¹⁸ I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.”¹⁹ They said to him therefore, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”

1. The Accusation (8:13, 19a)

Interestingly, unbelief has not changed in 2000 years. When people hear the voice of Christ through his followers today, they still try to eliminate the impact of his testimony. In some countries of the world they proceed to *eliminate the witness* - to have them killed. They did that to Christ.

Many times today they try to *discredit the witness* by demeaning a Christian's character - proclaiming that the Bible is not true and Christ was not what he claimed to be. Here the Pharisees clearly tried to demean Christ's character with the question, “Who is your father?” The scorn of their unbelief is reflected in their insulting and demeaning overtones insinuating that Joseph was not Christ's father, but that he was an illegitimate child.

But here there is a third line of attack. They try to *eliminate the force of his testimony* by raising a legal technicality. According to Old Testament law every fact and legal matter had to be established by at least two witnesses. You could not make claims about yourself or about others without corroborating witnesses. Even Jesus himself had said in chapter 5 that if he was the only witness to his Messiahship, then it would be reasonable to be skeptical of him. On this ground, the Pharisees flat out denied his claim to be the light to the Gentiles - the Messiah that had been promised.

2. Christ's answer (8:14-18, 19b)

But Christ answers their accusations with a threefold rebuttal:

1) Jesus is no ordinary witness.

Now it must be said, that is quite possible for the testimony of one person to be true even if it does not have any corroboration. This would most certainly be true of Christ who is the truth. But Jesus begins his threefold rebuttal by affirming his *heavenly origin*. At least seven times in this passage Jesus points to his relationship with the Father: the fact

that he has come from the Father, speaks on the authority of the Father, will return to the Father, and does nothing on his own apart from the Father. In short, he is saying that he speaks from God and for God and as God. To know Christ is to know God!

2) His accusers are woefully ignorant.

They revealed their pride and arrogance in judging Christ by superficial, insufficient knowledge. No accusation can be credible if the accusers are blind to the facts. To say it simply, they had no idea what they were talking about. They were not only mistaken in where he was born on earth, but had no understanding of his heavenly origin. Like all unbelievers, they were pronouncing judgment on spiritual things when as unredeemed sinners they could not possibly have understood them.

3) Jesus had corroborating witnesses

Earlier he had made clear that the Old Testament Scriptures supported his claims to deity and Messiahship, as did John the Baptist, as did his miraculous works, and as he now reiterates, his Heavenly Father.

Jesus had not come to judge, but that the world might be saved through him (John 3:17). In the future however Jesus will come to judge at the Bema Seat and great White Throne Judgment (John 5:22; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Romans 2:16; Second Timothy 4:1).

III. Jesus Reveals the Deadliness of Sin (8:21-29)

²¹ So he said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come." ²² So the Jews said, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?" ²³ He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins." ²⁵ So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. ²⁶ I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him." ²⁷ They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just 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.”

Jesus tells the Pharisees that he is going away. He is speaking of his death, resurrection, followed by his ascension into heaven. They would not follow him into heaven because they have rejected their Messiah. This passage reveals *four ways in which a person can ensure an eternal death*. If you travel down these four paths, if they become the epitaph of your life, you will most certainly come to a tragic end:

1. Be Self-righteous (8:22)

The Jewish leader's question shows the arrogance of their self-righteousness. They mockingly reasoned that Jesus would commit suicide. And the punishment for such an egregious act, they thought, was the lowest part of hell. They immediately jumped to this conclusion. Why? Because they thought that since they were most certainly going to heaven, their contempt for Jesus demanded that he must certainly be going to hell. Smugly confident in their own righteousness they mockingly and blasphemously twisted Jesus words. You see, they had bought into the “false gospel” of salvation by human achievement. They had forgotten the words of the prophet Isaiah that all our righteousness is like putrid rags in the eyes of God. It is through Christ's perfect righteous life that we are saved and not by any righteousness of our own.

2. Be Worldly (8:23)

Jesus reminds them that their origin, like their destiny, was much different from his. Whereas he came from heaven, they were from a completely different realm. They were “of this world.” By this Jesus meant (in this context) that they were subservient to and followers of the evil world system controlled by Satan, and therefore ignorant of and strongly opposed to God (Second Corinthians 10:5; John 12:31; First John 2:16). Jesus says to them in verse 44, “*You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.*” Worldliness worships the God of materialism, humanism, immorality, pride, and self centeredness. It is consumed by the sinful lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life.

3. Be Unbelieving (8:24)

Jesus makes it clear that they must believe that “I am.” (The pronoun *he* is not found in the original.) This is the name for God in the Old Testament (Exodus 3:14). Christ is saying that they must believe that he is the Messiah and that he is very God himself. In order to be saved, we must believe that Jesus is who he claimed to be - God. For salvation comes from and only from God. Salvation is from the LORD. So you cannot believe that Jesus is anything less than God if you are to be saved. Unbelief is the only unpardonable sin and to habitually practice it throughout your lifetime will cause you to die in your sin.

4. Be Willfully Ignorant (8:25-29)

The leaders respond by saying, “Who do you think you are!” Who was Jesus to tell them that they were going to die in their sins! Their stubborn, willful ignorance in the face of overwhelming evidence would seal the destiny of their souls. What they were willfully ignorant of was that every action Jesus took, every word that he said, and even the cross itself was in obedience to God and under the authority of his Father. To deny him was to deny the Father.

Further, the day was coming when the truth of Christ’s claims would be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt. The day would come when he would endure the cross and triumph over it through the resurrection. Jesus is saying to these Jews that they unwittingly are going to help him finish being the light of the world. They are going to lift him up, that is, crucify him. And when he is crucified, his role as the saving, redeeming, and creation filling light of the world will be secured. He will rise and reign and shine forever. He will ascend into heaven and a day of accounting will come when they will be judged for their unbelief and willful ignorance.

Conclusion

Joyfully, we can say that this chapter concludes in a triumphant manner. Verse 30 says, “*As he was saying these things, many believed in him.*” The light had pierced, enveloped, and unchained many hearts.

During the 2008 presidential race, John McCain was asked by *Time* magazine to share his "personal journey of faith." In his article McCain shared a powerful story of something that occurred while he was a prisoner of war in Vietnam: When I was a prisoner of war in

Vietnam...my captors would tie my arms behind my back and then loop the rope around my neck and ankles so that my head was pulled down between my knees. I was often left like that throughout the night. One night a guard came into my cell. He put his finger to his lips signaling for me to be quiet and then loosened my ropes to relieve my pain. The next morning, when his shift ended, the guard returned and retightened the ropes, never saying a word to me. A month or so later, on Christmas Day, I was standing in the dirt courtyard when I saw that same guard approach me. He walked up and stood silently next to me, not looking or smiling at me. Then he used his sandaled foot to draw a cross in the dirt. We stood wordlessly looking at the cross, remembering the true light of Christmas, even in the darkness of a Vietnamese prison camp. Jesus stands looking at you this morning as the light that God sent into your world. He is the light showing the way to deliverance from your sin - deliverance from God's wrath. He is the light that can be your guide and companion on your way and ultimately into God's fullest expression of his presence in heaven. You can say that you don't need the light, that you've got more important things to do, that you can see well enough on your own and die in your sin. Or you can respond to the light by receiving Christ as Savior and committing to live each day for the Lord. As we hear of more beheadings, more corruption in government, more financial woes and uncertainty - there is light at the end of the tunnel and through the tunnel. And that light is none other than Jesus Christ. What will you do with him?