
LIFE IN HIS NAME

JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 8:12-30

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." So the Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true." 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. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. 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. In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me." 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." These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

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." So the Jews said, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come?'" He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins." So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. 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." They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. 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. 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." As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Jesus makes one of his famous "I am" statements here. "I am the light of the world. If you follow me you will not walk in darkness. If you follow me you will have the light of life." What exactly

does Jesus mean when he promises that you will not walk in darkness, that you will have the light of life? I want to just give you three things. I am not putting these particular three things up on the power point. If you are taking notes, you might want to jot them down, though.

I want you to think about what darkness represents. To start with, darkness here and throughout scripture represents a lack of vision, a lack of guidance, a lack of understanding. To walk in darkness speaks of a certain ignorance -- a lack of understanding and enlightenment, a lack of vision. The first thing that Jesus is promising here is the positive of that. It's vision. It's understanding.

Secondly, to walk in darkness speaks of emotional darkness: Depression, discouragement, hopelessness. Darkness represents an absence of joy and hope. So in the positive, Jesus is promising hope. He is promising vision. He is promising hope.

And thirdly, he is promising freedom. Darkness always represents evil. It represents sin. It represents wickedness. Jesus is offering freedom from that entrapment, freedom from our own sin when we are trapped in cycles of sin, our own strongholds, and also freedom from the sin that's committed against us. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." We will not walk in darkness. We will have light to see. We will have life. These are the promises of Jesus.

Today, if you struggle with discouragement, if you need guidance, if you need vision, if you need hope, if you need joy, if you find yourself held by a stronghold in sin or a cycle of sin, or if you live your life reacting to, angry, embittered about sin committed against you, Jesus brings a promise of vision, a promise of hope, a promise of freedom. We will not walk in darkness. We will have light to see. We will have life.

Jesus is speaking in these chapters at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. You will remember that two events are celebrated for seven days. The Feast of the Tabernacles was the celebration of two events. #1 -- 40 years in the wilderness. When God led the children of Israel out of Egypt, they were in this very vulnerable place, wandering in the wilderness, and God was with them. He preserved them and he protected them and he provided for them. So they celebrated that special act of God's care and provision in that very vulnerable time in this feast. One of the things they did was to create temporary structures, little tabernacles or booths or tents. They entered into those

structures made out of branches to remember the time that they were wandering in the wilderness and God took care of them.

The second event celebrated was the harvest. This feast took place in our September or October, celebrating the harvest, celebrating God's provision in bringing in the harvest. Obviously, the harvest represented the difference between prosperity and poverty. Their complete dependence on God's provision culminated in that season, in that moment, and they were thanking God and praising him.

In the midst of the feast, as these two events were celebrated, there were two symbols, two symbolic acts that really captured the heart of the feast. One was water and the second was light. Remember that we looked at the previous chapter and we read these verses. John 7:37-39:

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.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

There was this water ceremony where the high priest would take a container of water out of the Pool of Siloam, he would march through the city and there would be a procession. He would come into the outer court and into the temple, and he would offer this water on the altar. That would happen at the end of the feast, and on the very last day, Jesus stands up and makes this promise: "Whoever believes in me, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." Jesus is promising: "I am the fulfillment of all that the Feast of Tabernacles represents. I am the one who cares for you. I am the one who gives you life. I am the one who provides for you, who protects you. I will do that living in you in the person of the Holy Spirit, and you will have rivers of living water flowing from you."

Now we discover that at the beginning of the feast, Jesus - well, Jesus makes a declaration connected to what happened at the beginning of the feast. At the end of the first day, the night after the first day of the feast, there would be a ceremony of lights. There were four candelabras in the outer court of the temple. Those candles, those torches would be lit. Then the people would light torches and run through the streets of Jerusalem, singing and dancing as the feast of seven days begins. The whole city of Jerusalem would be aglow.

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In light of that ceremony, Jesus proclaims these words: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." It's very powerful -- the images, the celebration, what the feast represents, Jesus declaring, "I give you life." Remember that the gospel of John is written that you might believe in Jesus and have life. In every imaginable way, in the heart of Judaism, in the heart of the Old Testament significance, their feasts and their celebrations, and the word of God, Jesus is saying, "I am the fulfillment of all that God has ever promised. Come to me and you will live."

In light of these specific promises, if you are depressed, you are discouraged, you need vision, you need provision, you need protection, I encourage you. What does this passage tell you to do? It's very clear: Follow Jesus. Follow him.

Let me share with you one verse from Exodus Chapter 13. If we go back to this season in the wilderness and what the light represents and how God guided and protected his people, let me just share these verses.

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. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

This is a magnificent thing that happens. This is right at the beginning, when the children of Israel had been brought out of Egypt. They had been miraculously delivered. Actually, the Egyptian army is still pursuing them. They are in danger, and God says, "I'm going to guide you and protect you by my very presence. There will be a cloud of my glory, a cloud of my presence in the daytime and a pillar of fire by night."

We read about it in the next chapter of Exodus, where the attack comes and the pillar of fire moves around between the people of God and the attacking forces. God illuminates at night all of the surrounding area, and he protects his people by his presence as he prepares for his people to cross over the Red Sea. Jesus is saying at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, "I am going to protect you by my very presence. I am going to put my Spirit within you. I am going to give you life."

Here is what you need to do: You need to follow Jesus. Are you discouraged? Are you depressed? Here is the promise: You will not walk in darkness. You will have the light of life. Do

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you feel like you are lost? Do you need guidance? Do you need direction? Do you need answers? The simple word of God to you and me today is: Follow Jesus.

I want to encourage you in the obvious. Remove - please listen carefully - remove everything in your life that hinders you from following Jesus. Stop negotiating with God. Stop holding on to what doesn't please God in your life. Give over all of yourself to Jesus Christ. Follow him. Leave everything else, every other love. Take off the restraints that hold God back from parts of your life.

Are you trapped in sin? I want to ask you: Does pornography have a hold on your life? Do you live trapped under the oppression of sexual sin? Are you seeing prostitutes? Are you going to strip clubs? Are you involved in acts of immorality? Are you having an affair? Are you sleeping with someone you are not married to? Are you compromising in life? Is there any area of your life that doesn't belong to Jesus Christ?

Have you kept your money back from God? Do you give? Do you give generously? Do you help those in need? Do you tithe? Do you lay all of your anxiety about financial concerns before God? Do you take them to him? Have you said to God openly with an open heart: "All that I have has come from you and it belongs to you and I want to use it to honor your name"?

Have you given God your time? Are you stingy with your time? Are you following Jesus with your talents, with your treasures, with your time? Does Jesus Christ possess your heart? Are you offended at the mere questions, that God would take ownership of all that you are? Do you wish right now that you were in some church where some pastor fed you seafoam and told you what you wanted to hear?

Are you living in community in the church? Are you taking the risk of opening your heart to others, to live in community, in Christ, in relationship, where your life is transparent, where they see the mess that you are and learn to love you anyway?

Follow him. Follow Jesus. Know his presence, so that the glory of Christ shines in your life and illuminates everything else. It's not so much that we come to Jesus to get vision, to get hope, to get freedom. It is: We come to Jesus to get Jesus. And as a result with Jesus we get vision, hope, joy, freedom.

We are not surprised that the leaders in Jesus' day just didn't get it. And a crazy conversation follows. When you read this conversation you just scratch your head. They always want to go to

this subject about....they want signs, they want witnesses. Remember, back in John 5 Jesus gave them a list of witnesses: “John the Baptist, Moses, all the Old Testament scripture, my miracles. I have all of these witnesses, but truthfully, they all point to one witness. You only need that witness, and that one witness is God. He is my Father. He spoke through all of them, pointing to me. All of the Old Testament scripture, all that Moses said, all that John the Baptist did, all that my miracles represent point to: God has sent me. I only speak what he gives me to speak. I only do what he tells me to do.”

Jesus now just cuts right to it. He doesn't take them through that list. He just says, “Listen, you want two witnesses? You've got me and my Father. But, you don't know me and you don't know that I come from God, the Father. The reason I know that, or at least in part,” Jesus discloses, “is that if you knew God at all, you would recognize me as one sent from God, because I only do what he gives me to do.”

Then, in the course of the conversation Jesus identifies several things. I'm going to give you three - three things that limit your spiritual vision, three things that keep you from seeing Christ. The first one is this: Flesh.

I. Flesh.

Verse 15: “You judge according to the flesh.” This Greek word “flesh” is used in three different ways in scripture.

- It's used sometimes to speak of physical cells, like your human flesh.
- It's also used in a general way to speak of human nature. “Flesh” is just used to describe all that's human.
- Then it's used in a third way to speak of sinful nature, that a fleshy person is a carnal person, a person who is given to doing bad things and living immorally.

So, physical cells, human nature in general, and sinful nature - those three meanings throughout scripture.

Here, Jesus is speaking about human nature. He is saying to them, “You don't see me, you don't recognize me because you just live in the natural. You reject the supernatural. You reject the spiritual.” So, he asks them this difficult question: “What does it look like to see things in the spirit, to see things spiritually?”

I think it's appropriate for us to recognize the limitations of what we can do naturally, humanly speaking. The first hindrance is just a denial of the supernatural, the denial of God, the unwavering skepticism that expects God not to work. The unbelief that argues with God's presence, God's will, God's word. They judge according to the flesh, therefore they cannot see properly and they walk in darkness.

II. The World.

The second limitation, block, hindrance to spiritual vision is the world. He said to them in verse 23, "You are from below, I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world." You know, we need to be careful here and just acknowledge that Jesus is proclaiming himself to be the light of the world. John 3:16: "For God so loved the world..." The message here is not that God hates the world, but Jesus is identifying a message that is repeated over and over and over in scripture, that the world and its systems oppose God. If that is what we long for, and if that is what we allow to be the loud voice in our lives, we will not see Jesus and we will not understand him. We won't worship him.

John Newton, the famous hymn writer, tells the story about a woman who lost a great fortune. She lost all of her family wealth. He went to see her. She was devastated. She was in tears, as he expected her to be. When he asked her about her loss, she said, "Pastor Newton, I'm upset, but I'm more upset that I'm upset. I'm upset that this troubles me so much."

So John Newton told this story. He said, "I want you to imagine that there is a person who has been granted a great estate -- massive, massive wealth -- and they are on the way to collect that estate and to live in their new home, their new castle. They get almost there. They are a mile away, in our terminology, and their carriage breaks down. Perhaps you could pretend for a moment that that carriage was the one half-decent thing they had before they got this inheritance. Imagine this person getting out of their broken carriage, walking to their inheritance, wringing their hands saying, "My carriage is broken! My carriage is broken!" Would you look at that person and feel for them? No, you would feel disgust, right? If it's you, you just walk the half mile into your new castle with carriages galore! What's his message? Christian, stop crying about broken carriages. You have a glorious inheritance.

I want to just be transparent here. I pray for God's material provision in my life. I would honestly tell you, when I look at the catalog of sins in my own life, which are very many and I will spare you

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taking you through the list, that one that I have found to be very powerful is the love of money and the draw of worldliness. I believe that it's not an accident that when Jesus said, "You can only have one master," that the opposing master he chose to really represent all opposing masters was the master of money.

I want to be transparent with you and say that I fight this battle on a spiritual level. I pray for God's provision. I pray for God's financial blessing. I am always praying to be out of debt personally, praying for my zillion kids to get through college. I pray for cars. I pray that all the cars He gives us will somehow miraculously not break down. I pray, "God, give me this day my daily bread." Right? I'm praying for this church to be debt free.

Now, all of this is a big parenthesis. I want you to stay with me. Don't go to sleep. Don't get out your bible app, your new church app just yet. I have five sons and a daughter. Now my daughter is married and, well, she's off the payroll. But I teach my sons: "Work hard. Make money. Make good money. Be ready to take care of yourself, to have something to give to others, to take care of a family."

I'm trying to say to you, when I talk about how the world blocks spiritual vision, I'm aware of the fact that we live in the world and we have these concerns. They are real, and they are legitimate, and we live it all in God, and we want to honor God with all of it. But let's get real and say there's a tension where it will grab and hold our hearts and just squeeze out the spiritual life. Right? I know, I can just prove it to you. You feel the tension in the room when you start talking about money. Now there's a whole doctrine out there that pastors aren't even supposed to talk about it. Jesus talked about it all the time. And the church is guilty of tremendous abuses - greed, misuse. Not this church, not in that sense, I pray. The World.

Pat Summit, fantastic basketball coach, recently died. She coached the University of Tennessee, the winningest coach of all time, way over 1000 victories. She coached for 34 years. She died at 64 years of age of Alzheimer's. Tragically, she had to live out somewhat publically the early onset of that terrible disease. Eight national championships, 16 SEC championships. Some of the more remarkable features of her magnificent career were that 100% -- every single young woman who played basketball for her and went through her program -- graduated with a college degree. That's amazing. Amazing. There are 74 coaches today that came out of her program. She was a woman of great influence.

One of the acts prominent in her funeral was that she was baptized with her son publically in 2012. She had six miscarriages in life, one son. She went through a painful divorce. Her son went through public scandal. She is a wonderful example of a woman who was a trailblazer, who impacted so many people, of tremendous reputation in this world, but she had to go outside of this world for what she needed most. Late in life, fighting Alzheimer's, she came to know Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior, and made that very, very public.

My message to you from Jesus today is: You cannot find what you need in this world; you have to find it in Jesus. And the leaders of Jesus' day, the religious people in Jesus' day just don't see it. The third hindrance to spiritual sight is Sin.

III. Sin.

They have a sin problem. Verse 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." They can't go to where Jesus is going. They can't follow him. They have a severe transportation problem, because they will die in their sin. Their sin has separated them from God. They don't understand. They walk in darkness. Their sin has separated them from God and is now creating separation from one another. I would suggest to you that the only healing that we can find in the midst of misunderstanding in our culture will ultimately be found in Jesus Christ, because ultimately our problem is a problem of the heart. It's a problem that comes from sin.

We end with this. This is where our passage ends today, and that is with this one word of explanation. There is one great eye-opening event in history that removes these obstacles. Verse 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. 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." As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Jesus is referencing the cross. We have seen this already in the book of John. Do you remember in John Chapter 3 when Jesus is talking to Nicodemus, he said he had to be lifted up, as the bronze serpent in the desert had to be lifted up? We looked at that glorious story, where the children of Israel grumbled against God and they took their sin so far in the evil things that were said about

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God and to God, that God brought instant judgment. Serpents came in the camp and the people were dying as a result.

Then as the people came to Moses and repented and asked for help, do you remember that God did something very unusual? He told them to make an image, a bronze serpent. It seems to us to be a violation of what scripture teaches about making images and about idolatry, but he tells them, "Lift up that serpent and everyone who looks to it will be healed," a prophetic foreshadowing of Jesus Christ being lifted up. The snake was the curse of sin; Jesus being lifted up, carrying our curse.

It's really a magnificent representation of the gospel, that God would do this most unusual thing, almost in a way that it seems he forbids elsewhere in scripture, because he wants us to see that the cross is not an afterthought. He is willing to take your sin on himself, for it to be placed on him so that you might be able to see, that you might be able to come to the light and be forgiven of sin and set free from the hold that sin and the world and your flesh have, limiting us from seeing true spiritual reality.

Here is the response for you. The response is: Follow Jesus. Some of you today are actually caught in a cycle of discouragement, depression. You really do need direction. You are fighting a sin that you feel has got a hold on your life. I want you for now to take your focus off those issues and to put them on Jesus, to follow him. That's where freedom begins.

Let's pray.