

John, Part 33: The Light of the World

John 8:12 ESV 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.”

- I. When we started this series last fall, we told you that John was built on a skeletal structure of 7 signs that Jesus performed, as well as 7 “I AM” statements he made.
 - A. We have already discussed 5 of the seven signs. We will wrap up that part of the book up in chapters 9 and 11. But with our text this morning, we have arrived at only the second “I AM” statement. Do you remember the first?
 - B. **John 6:35 ESV** Jesus said to them, “*I am the bread of life*; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.
 1. In the first 7 chapters, Jesus points to himself as the one who satisfies the hungry and thirsty 3 separate times. This cements a theme in John of Jesus as *the only one who truly sustains us*.
 2. But now, John adds a second theme. Christ is the one who gives *light*. He’s been developing this theme since the introduction of the book.
 - a) **John 1:4 ESV** In him was life, and the life was the *light* of men. **5** The *light* shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
 - b) In fact, in just the first 3 chapters, John has connected Jesus to light in 8 separate verses within his narration.
 - C. But now we have Christ saying of *himself*, “I am the light of the world.” Why is this significant?
 - II. You’ll recall that last week I told about the conclusion that scholars had come to concerning the verses preceding our passage today (about the adulterous woman).
 - A. It is almost a universally held opinion that verses 7:53-8:11 were not originally penned by John. Let’s talk about that again for just a moment.
 1. One of the reasons that this account’s origin is questioned is because it seems to be jammed into the middle of the dialogue taking place. It simply doesn’t seem to “fit”.
 2. So last week we assumed that very best about the passage, and talked about it’s beauty. Today, I’d like for us to assume that (at the very least) that story is in the wrong place chronologically, and show you what happens when we move it out of the way in the flow of the story.
 3. I’d like to step back a few verses in chapter 7, skip the suspect verses from last week’s text, and pick up at today’s verse, to show you what I mean.
 - B. **John 7:45 ESV** The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why did you not bring him?” **46** The officers answered, “No one ever spoke like this man!” **47** The Pharisees answered them, “Have you also been deceived? **48** Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? **49** But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” **50** Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, **51** “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” **52** They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.” **8:12** 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 what can we learn by reading the passage this way?

1. For one thing, the events described, when you skip over the controversial section, seem to all take place on the same day.
 2. It is the day described in chapter 7 as “the last day of the feast (of Tabernacles), the great day”. You’ll remember that this festival is the one when the Jews would commemorate with elaborate symbolism their wanderings in the desert after God delivered them from Egypt.
 - a) We saw a few weeks ago that earlier on this same day, Jesus identified **himself** as the source of water that provides for thirsty souls; as opposed to the rock at Horeb that Moses struck with his staff. But he’s not done.
 - b) One of the ceremonial elements of the feast was that the Jews would light 4 giant menorahs in the temple court, the light of which could be seen through the entire city. They burned for all 7 nights of the festival.
- C. This was to remind the Jews of how God manifested himself to the children of Israel with a pillar of fire for 40 years as they trekked through the wilderness. The purpose of this revelation was four-fold:
1. First, it was part of God’s method to guide his people, showing them the way to go. **Deuteronomy 1:33 ESV** (God) went before you in the way to seek you out a place to pitch your tents, **in fire by night** and in the cloud by day, to show you by what way you should go. When the cloud and fire moved, the people moved. When the cloud and fire stopped, they stayed put.
 2. Second, it was to mark out the dwelling place of God. **Exodus 40:34 ESV** Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. **35** And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. **36** Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. **37** But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. **38** For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, **and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.**
 - a) God clearly marked his dwelling place with fire. There was no way to die by accidentally by wandering in to the most holy presence of the Lord, because where he was was designated by a gloriously radiant inferno.
 - b) Similarly, the people didn’t have to consult prophets or priests to know where God was in relation to them, because of the brilliant flame that resting on the Tabernacle, that lit up the night sky for all of them.
 3. Third, the purpose of the pillar of fire was to terrify and confront the enemies of God’s people. **Exodus 14:24 ESV** And in the morning watch **the Lord in the pillar of fire** and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and **threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, 25** clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from before Israel, for **the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.**”

4. Fourthly, the purpose of the flame was to give them light in a dark place in which none of them had been before, and with which they were completely unfamiliar. **Nehemiah 9:12 ESV** By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night **to light for them the way** in which they should go...**19** you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the **pillar of fire by night to light for them the way** by which they should go.
- D. Now in Jesus' time, the Jews had this facsimile, 4 huge lamps that burned for seven nights once a year, to remind them of this comforting, protective provision from Yahweh God from way back in their history.
 1. It's like how we buy tiny explosives (fireworks) on Independence Day to commemorate "the rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air" that "gave proof through the night that our flag was still there".
 2. It gets the job done as a representation of larger reality from our history (although most of the guys wish, just once, we could try it with actual missiles and bombs! That would be a BBQ no one would soon forget!).
 - E. But just like the morning of the 5th of July, when everyone's lawn is covered with the remains of all the fireworks, the Jews festival had ended. The burning torches had been snuffed out, not to be lit for another year, and even then only as a dim reminder of past glory.
 1. It was standing in the very place in the Temple where the lights would have stood, that Jesus, looking at them, says, **"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."**
 2. Just as he had done earlier in the day, he was pointing to a cherished part of their history, and saying, "This was all about me. To truly understand your past, you must look no further than to me. I put it all in proper context."
- III. The lights in the Temple had been snuffed out. The glory of the old covenant based on law and the righteous wrath of God, was being fulfilled, making room for a better covenant of forgiveness; of righteousness that could not be earned, but that would be freely given; one of true and eternal reconciliation between God and man.
- A. Just like Jesus was more able to quench their thirst than that old, forgotten rock in the footprints of the desert of Sinai, he would now shine brighter than the glory that once burned brightly over the Tabernacle. How?
 1. The light of Christ would be eternal. Jesus was pointing out that the lights of the festival were merely symbolic in their 7 days of glorious illumination.
 - a) They were they were even more symbolic as they stood cold and extinguished. They were a true picture of the state of things. It had been generations since any Jew had seen the pillar of the fire of God's glory!
 - b) But now a better light was being given; one that would never be extinguished or even dimmed; one that would burn brighter and brighter in indescribable glory throughout all eternity. Comparing Christ's glory to the Pillar of Fire would be like comparing the Sun to a birthday candle!
 2. The light of Christ would be universal. The fire of the Exodus burned for the benefit of some and the terror of others. But not the light of Christ! It would be for everyone who believes, regardless of race.

- a) It's interesting that one of the main points of the Jew's bickering in John 7 the place of Jesus origin. "North or South? Bethlehem or Nazareth? Judea or Galilee? No prophets come from Galilee! Can he even be David's heir if he's from the North?"
 - b) Yet in answer to all of this, Jesus looks at their snuffed out, insufficient lamps and says, "I am the light, not of the Judeans or Galileans, the North or the South, the Jews or the Gentiles, **but of the entire world!**"
 - c) When the old man Simeon held the 8 day old baby Jesus in the Temple courts, he said, **Luke 2:30 ESV "...my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."**
- B. But how would Christ be this "light for revelation" to the whole world? What functions would he perform?
1. Just like the Pillar of Fire in the wilderness, he would be God's lamp of illumination to show people where they should go.
 - a) **Isaiah 30:20 ESV** And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet **your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. 21** And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "**This is the way, walk in it,**" when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.
 - b) The Bible says that no one can come to Jesus unless he is drawn (John 6:44). No one finds Jesus by feeling in the dark. The Spirit must guide them by the brightness of Jesus' light if we are ever to find him.
 2. In the Exodus, the fire designated the dwelling place of God. This New Covenant reality has two aspects.
 - a) First, in Jesus as the dwelling place of God. **John 14:10 ESV** Do you not believe that **I am in the Father and the Father is in me?** The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who **dwells in me** does his works.
 - (1) Not only was Christ "in the Father", but the Bible also speaks of how, after Jesus was Baptized, he entered the wilderness full of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1).
 - (2) Jesus referred to himself as "the Temple" (the dwelling place of the glory of God) in 3 out of the 4 gospels. His life was thoroughly marked by the "heaven-residing" God as his most prized dwelling place.
 - (3) **Colossians 1:19 ESV** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.
 - b) Secondly, in giving us the Holy Spirit to dwell in and empower us, he has also designated every believer as his chosen place of residence.
 - (1) Interestingly enough for our discussion today, in Matthew and Luke, John the Baptist is quoted as saying that Jesus will baptize us in the "Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt 3:11, Lk 3:16). He literally takes the flame of his presence, symbolized in the Exodus, and fills us with it!

- (2) Do you remember what happened when the Spirit descended on the church on the Day of Pentecost? **Acts 2:3 ESV** *And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.*
- (3) Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that, because of all this, WE are now the temple, literally the dwelling place of God, marked out by fire!
- 3. Next we remember that the Pillar of Fire was to confront and terrify the enemies of the people of God. Jesus marvelously fulfilled this role!
 - a) Peter tells the household of Cornelius **Acts 10:38 ESV** *“how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. **He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.**”*
 - b) Some of you imagine that Jesus is locked in great cosmic battle with the forces of evil; marching out against them in armor and all manner of weapons. This is not true!
 - (1) In Luke 11:20, Jesus says he casts out devils by the “finger of God”! I don’t want to be crass, but Jesus deals with the powers of spiritual darkness like they are mere bugs! He just flicks them away!
 - (2) What?!? Haven’t you ever read how the demons trembled in his presence? How they begged him not to unleash his terrible judgements on them prematurely? How they preferred to dwell in swine rather than do battle with him?
 - c) The Light of the World is absolutely blinding to every last enemy of your soul! They don’t stand a chance! Fear not! Just let him fight your battle!
- 4. Lastly, Like that Pillar of Fire in the Wilderness, Christ is the one who bathes this dark world in true light.
 - a) Many have rejected him from their lives. They have called him a myth and a fairy story, irrelevant to the things that the modern society values. Others have feared that he would interfere with their lives, the plans, their sin (and you better believe he would!).
 - b) In so doing, they have embraced the darkness. **John 3:19 ESV** *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and **people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.***
 - (1) Look at that highlighted portion again. Think of the ramifications. Often we think that if only poor sinners knew how good Jesus (the Light of the World) was, that they would come running to him out of their darkness. That is false. John 3 says we dwell in darkness because we love the darkness, because our deeds are evil, and we hate exposure, like a bunch of cockroaches scurrying away from light.
 - (2) I know the addict may hate the job losses and broken families that result from his sin, but just try to pry the bottle from his hands and see what he truly loves! I know that no woman wants an unplanned pregnancy, but try to tell her to respect the image of God within her, and listen to her rail on about her “right” to choose! I know the greedy

materialist hates the stacks of credit card debt, but just let the “Joneses” get a better house or car and see where his treasures lie! Don’t doubt the scriptures. We love the darkness!

- c) But mercifully, Christ Jesus shows up to the elect of God, and, as Peter says in his epistle, calls us “out of darkness into his marvelous light”.
 - (1) There’s a beautiful Old Testament passage predicting the coming of the Lord Jesus to save sinners. In fact Matthew points to this verse as proof of Jesus’ divine origin.
 - (2) **Isaiah 9:2 ESV** 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*. **3** You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. **4 For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken** as on the day of Midian. **5** For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. **6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**
 - d) Are you in deep darkness? On you a great light has shone. God has broken the yoke of sin’s burden. A child named Jesus has been born for you. A Son named Jesus has been given for you on the cross. Walk in his light and he will be to you a Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God, an Everlasting Father, and a Prince of Peace.
 - e) Is God calling you today out of darkness? Respond! The light trumps the darkness every time. Stop thinking of what you must give up or change, for the sake of Christ, think of all you gain! Everything! You will share in Christ’s own inheritance!
5. What a promise Jesus makes to those who would run toward his light! “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” What more could you ask for?
- a) He does not say you should not walk in darkness, or that you get better at not walking in darkness, but that you **will not** walk in darkness! The reign of darkness ends for the one who will simply say “yes” to Christ!
 - b) **1 John 1:5 ESV** This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. **6** If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
 - c) We don’t walk in the light **so that** we can have fellowship with him, our walking in the light **is evidence** that we have fellowship with him!