



Sunday School Lesson for January 28, 2007
Released on January 24, 2007

"Jesus Is the Light of the World"

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 35:3–10.
Background Scripture: John 8:12–20; 12:44–46.
Printed Text: John 8:12–20; 12:44–46.

John 8:12–20

12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.
13 The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true.
14 Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go.
15 Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.
16 And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me.
17 It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true.
18 I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.
19 Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.
20 These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come.

John 12:44–46

44 Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.
45 And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.
46 I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

Introduction

John is especially forceful among the Gospels in presenting Jesus as the Son of God. Generally speaking, Matthew presents Jesus as a king, Mark as a servant, and Luke as the perfect man. Each Gospel seems to have been intended to reach a particular group of people with the truth about Jesus. John includes seven significant "I am" statements by Jesus, which offer a great deal of insight into who He truly is and what He came to accomplish. Last week's text included the first of these statements, "I am the bread of life" (6:35).

The second of the statements is in the text for this week: "I am the light of the world" (8:12). The others are "I am the door" (10:7), "I am the good shepherd" (v. 11), "I am the resurrection, and the life" (11:25), "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6), and "I am the true vine" (15:1).
Jesus is God Himself giving light to a dark world.

Darkness is a powerful figure of speech. At least part of the reason is because we fear the dark and what may be lurking there. The Bible often uses the imagery of darkness to describe the spiritual state of those whose lives are not directed by God. A few such passages are Acts 26:18; Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:4, 5; and 1 John 2:11. In today's lesson Jesus discusses His role as the light of the world.

In that role, He is the one who brings hope by revealing God to us. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

Lesson Background

John 8 seems to follow directly on Jesus' teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles. There He promised the gift of "living water" (the Spirit) to those who believe in Him (last week's lesson).

Up to that point the crowds were divided on His message. Some had concluded that Jesus was the "Prophet" (John 7:40). Others thought Him to be the Messiah or Christ (John 7:41). The chief priests sent the temple guards to arrest Him, but they returned empty-handed after being overwhelmed by His authoritative teaching (John 7:45, 46).

Some of the leading Pharisees, including Nicodemus (compare John 3:1-10), debated among themselves about Jesus' identity (7:50-52). Jesus then explicitly identified himself as the one sent to reveal God in the midst of a dark world.

Today's Aim

Facts: to examine passages in which Jesus proclaims Himself to be the Light of the world.

Principle: to show that Jesus is indeed the Light of the world.

Application: to challenge believers to walk in Jesus' light.

Light of the World (John 8:12)

Jesus' Identity

1. Why is there so much darkness in the world, and what is our hope (John 8:12)?

"Life involves conflict between God, who is good, and evil powers. Evil is darkness, shutting out opportunity to see or know good. God is the source of light which exposes evil for what it is. Jesus is that light in person exposing the evil of the world and pointing the way to God" (*Disciple's Study Bible*, Holman). We live in a world controlled by Satan (John 14:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2), though it is under the ultimate control of God. Evil is prevalent everywhere on this globe.

As the description above states, evil is darkness. We live in a dark world. In many nations the darkness is so great that it is dangerous for Christians to be present, for the forces of evil prevail and control the thinking of the people. Our own nation can no longer rightly be referred to as a Christian nation, because living by the principles of God's Word is no longer foremost in the minds of most people. We would probably be shocked if we knew the extent of Satan worship and other manifestations of evil in our own nation.

There is only one hope for dispelling this darkness; it is found in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He boldly declared, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). Jesus was not claiming to be a light but *the* Light, which was a claim of deity.

Jesus exposes sin, dispels darkness, and shines into the world through His children. The forces of darkness cannot stand against this light.

Pharisees Challenge Jesus

2. Why did the Pharisees challenge Jesus' self-witness (v. 13)?

"Not true" means that Jesus has not, in the opinion of *the Pharisees*, sufficiently substantiated His claims about himself. The Law of Moses requires that testimony and truth claims in criminal proceedings can be accepted only on the testimony of multiple witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). The Pharisees therefore plead that they, and everyone else, are allowed to dismiss Jesus' claims about himself.

Jesus Refutes Pharisees (vs. 14–18)

3. Why did Jesus speak of where He came from and where He was going (v. 14)?

Jesus begins His defense by arguing that His case is unique, simply because no other human being is in a position to testify on His behalf. Jesus' response was that He could bear witness of Himself because His words were always the truth. He was not a liar, as they assumed. In addition He knew where He had come from and where He was going (see John 13:3). They knew nothing about this. While this might not have sounded like very good evidence to those listening, we understand that He was challenging them with facts that they should have known about their Messiah but did not. If they would listen carefully to His words and observe His works, they would recognize Him.

Jesus' origin was heaven and His Father. He would return to His Father in due time (through death and resurrection); so He understood His destiny. There are times when an individual is the only one who knows the entire truth about a matter. No one else has the facts he does. This is why some of our court cases are so difficult to resolve. Jesus was a true witness because of His comprehensive knowledge about His origin and destiny. Even though the Pharisees thought they knew much about Him, they were woefully lacking in the knowledge of these things.

4. In what ways do people still say “not true” when it comes to Jesus? Why do they do this?

Some people are inclined to make decisions on the basis of what seems rational to them. While God gave us minds and expects us to love Him with those minds (compare Matthew 22:37), we need His revelation through Scripture to make accurate spiritual decisions (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Others are inclined to trust their feelings and subjective impulses. While God sometimes confirms our decisions through such subjective means (Acts 2:37), these urges cannot be trusted in and of themselves.

The popularity of a decision or the number of people making the same choice also is an untrustworthy means of assessment. The majority is not always right (though the minority is not always right either).

5. How did Jesus say His judgment would differ from that of the Pharisees (vs. 15,16)?

Jesus said the Pharisees judged according to the flesh, that is, by what they could see and hear only. They looked at external things and judged by human standards with no concept of how God views things.

When the Pharisees look at Jesus, they see a man from Galilee who has remarkable abilities but unorthodox teaching. He doesn't fit their understanding of a prophet or the Christ. They are therefore unable to recognize the source of His power (John 7:52; 9:29).

As a result Jesus disqualifies the Pharisees from passing judgment on Him. He appeals instead to God as the ultimate witness to His identity. Jesus judges *no man* in the way that the Pharisees do (see 1 Samuel 16:7).

6. What causes people to reject Jesus as their source of spiritual guidance in favor of something or someone else? How do you protect yourself from making this kind of mistake?

In some cultures many people reject Jesus because of His absolute and exclusive claims. If He claimed to be *a* way to God rather than *the* way to God, they would find Him less offensive. If He offered ethical suggestions rather than commands, He would be more acceptable.

Pride deludes others into thinking that they have no need for spiritual guidance at all. These people prefer to live life without accountability. Believers, who claim Jesus as their source of spiritual guidance, guard themselves against falling into this error through prayer. Prayer by its very nature recognizes that God exists and that we are answerable to Him.

7. What Old Testament basis of testimony did Jesus use against His accusers (vs. 17,18)?

Jesus reminds His accusers that Moses had taught that *two* witnesses are sufficient to establish guilt or innocence (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). On the topic of His identity, Jesus has testified on His own behalf, and He now calls *the Father* to the stand in His defense. The Father's *witness* (or *testimony*) here most likely refers to the works that Jesus does by God's power (John 5:36). The Gospels use Jesus' miracles as signs of His identity; the signs establish His credibility (John 2:11; etc.).

In the “purpose statement” of this Gospel (John 20:30, 31), the apostle makes clear the reason for the signs. When people watch Jesus turn water into wine or raise Lazarus from the dead, they should see the evidence for His claims about himself.

Know Me, Know My Father (vs. 19, 20)

8. What did Jesus mean when He said that they knew neither Him nor His Father (v. 19)?

If Jesus was going to claim His Father as His witness, the Pharisees wanted to know where he was. They would like to interview him. They were thinking, as usual, in human terms only; so they asked about His earthly father. Since they had rejected Jesus' message and claims of deity, they could not understand how God could be Jesus' Father. Jesus replied that the question itself revealed their ignorance. They did not know Him or His Father. If they had known Him, they would have known His Father too.

9. Why was no one able to apprehend Jesus (v. 20)?

All of this was taking place in a very public place referred to as the "treasury" (v. 20). Considering the intensity of opposition, it would seem that people must have been present who were eager to arrest Jesus and get rid of Him. John explained that even though this was the case, no one laid hands on Him, simply because "his hour was not yet come." The implication is that they were ready to act but were divinely restrained from doing so.

We know that the Pharisees wanted to arrest Jesus and have Him under their control. But God's plan was not at the point when this was meant to occur. It is good to be reminded that God is in control of every situation.

10. How does God's protection of Jesus provide spiritual encouragement to you? What are some dangers of directly applying this example to our own lives?

We can derive great spiritual strength and contentment from knowing that God's ultimate purposes are never thwarted. Nothing and no one could stand in the way of Jesus' mission of reconciliation! It is comforting to be reminded of God's authority and power (Isaiah 55:11).

The uniqueness of Jesus' person and work must also be noted, however. God undoubtedly protects and sustains His people as an expression of His concern for us and for His global mission. There are no passages in the Bible that guarantee that God will preserve our earthly lives. Through Christ, however, He does provide significance to our earthly lives and an eternal hope beyond them.

Escape from Darkness (John 12:44-46)

God's Special Agent

11. What did Jesus mean when He said that "He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me" (John 12:44)?

It was now the final week of Jesus' life. He had already made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (vs. 12-15). He had announced that the light was going to be with them for only a short time more, after which they needed to be certain they walked in light and not in darkness (v. 35). John reported that even though Jesus had given many evidences of who He was, many people still did not believe in Him (v. 37). Many others did believe, however, including some of the rulers (v. 42).

At some point Jesus evidently called out loudly so that everyone in the vicinity could hear clearly. His opening words were "He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me" (vs. 44-45). He was assuring the people that anyone who believed in Him was at the same time believing in

God, His Father. Anyone who saw Jesus for who He really was, was also seeing God as He really is. Jesus was claiming to be the visible manifestation of God!

Later Jesus would say to Philip, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (14:9). Jesus clearly claimed to be God. As such, He was the promised Messiah for whom Israel had been waiting. They needed to believe, that is, have faith, in Him. They had to entrust their entire spiritual well-being to Him if they were ever to be in heaven with God.

So it is with us. Our eternal destiny depends on what we do about Jesus Christ, who came to earth and died for us.

Your spiritual well-being must be entrusted to Him. He is waiting to be your Saviour now if you have never received Him.

That is why it is important to emphasize the most important matter first: believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved (Acts 16:31). There is no other requirement. Once this decision has been made, the pathway to spiritual understanding and learning to live in the light has begun.

12. In what ways can trusting in Jesus help us understand world darkness and His light (v. 46)?

The emphasis of this lesson has been on Jesus as the Light of the world. We have noted that the presence of evil throughout the world causes the world to be in darkness. We have also noted that Jesus repeatedly referred to Himself as the source of spiritual light in this dark world. Once again He made His claim: He came as a light into the world, and whoever believes in Him will not walk in darkness. It is a matter of having spiritual understanding as opposed to being ignorant of God's ways.

The world is spiritually dark in two senses. First, most people do not adequately understand the nature of God himself. As a consequence they do not really understand who they are as people created in God's image. Of course, the Jews of Jesus' day claim that they are God's elect people, blessed with a special revelation of His true nature. Even they, however, are walking in darkness because only through faith in Christ can they truly know God's nature (compare John 12:35, 36).

Second, the world is dark in the sense that people do not live lives that please God. Instead they stumble blindly in pursuit of worldly pleasures that ultimately leave them longing for fulfillment (compare Romans 1:18–32). Like a thirsty man who is given saltwater instead of refreshing water, this pursuit only increases the thirst. Jesus came to rescue us from this ignorance and despair—for eternity.

CONCLUSION

Piercing the Deepest Darkness

The image of Jesus as light is a powerful theme in the Gospel of John. Physical light has some marvelous characteristics that allow this image to function beautifully as a description of Christ. Consider this example: you can go into an utterly dark room and light a tiny birthday candle, and all the darkness of that room cannot stop the little light from shining. The smallest candle can dispel the deepest, blackest darkness.

On the other hand, you cannot go into a brightly lighted room with a box of darkness, open the box, and expect the darkness to dim the brightness. Darkness cannot overcome light (John 1:5). This is the case because darkness is, by definition, the absence of something—the absence of light.

When we speak figuratively of the dark world in which we live, we are highlighting the fact that the world is missing or ignoring God. Just as light always overcomes

darkness, God's purposes will always overcome evil in this world. Of course, some people choose to close their eyes. But those who open their eyes will find a way through the darkness to eternal life and peace.

Avoiding Counterfeit Light

The issue of "light vs. darkness" is well defined. Spiritually mature Christians clearly recognize the choice. But another issue we face is what we may call "true light vs. counterfeit light." We face this problem since "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Many sincere Christians are determined to avoid the darkness of sin, and Satan knows this well. So instead of offering those Christians something that is obviously in the category of *dark*, he offers something that seems, at first glance, to fit within God's light.

This deception can take many forms, and Satan is very crafty. For example a harmless hobby that provides needed rest and relaxation can become an obsession and an addiction, wrecking the family budget. Eating that extra piece of pie at the restaurant buffet can be rationalized as "good stewardship" since "I'm getting my money's worth." Remember, when Satan offered certain temptations to Jesus, he even backed up his ideas with Scripture! (See Matthew 4:1-11.)

So how do we recognize and avoid counterfeit light? The first line of defense is to know the Scriptures thoroughly. Jesus is our example here, since that was how He refuted Satan during the temptation in the wilderness. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).

The second line of defense is prayer. Jesus saw this as an important part of avoiding temptation (Mark 14:38). A third line of defense is mutual accountability. Invite a fellow Christian to point out your spiritual blind spots. Then consider his or her counsel very carefully! (See Proverbs 19:20.)

PRAYER:

Lord, we live in a dark and confused world. Sometimes it is hard even to know what we should do, much less to do it. Please light our way as we seek to serve You, and please also help us shine the light of Christ on others. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER:

The light of Jesus can—and does—pierce the deepest spiritual darkness.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:

Study **John 10:1-18** "I Am the Good Shepherd."

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY:

Willie Ferrell willie@jesusisall.com