



John 8:12-20  
I Am  
The Light of the World

Rev. Brian North  
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This morning we continue in our series looking at the claims of Jesus in the gospel of John, with regards to who he is. John records for us seven statements in particular that we will look at, each beginning with Jesus' words, "I am..." and then finishing it with a metaphor that reveals to us some of who he is.

In this morning's passage, Jesus says, **"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12)**. He made this statement in the middle of a conversation he had with a crowd of people in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. All of John 7, take place in the middle of the Feast of Tabernacles, one of seven Jewish festivals each year. This one was usually in the fall, equivalent to our late September or early October.<sup>i</sup> One of the ceremonial activities of the Feast of Tabernacles was the lighting of candelabras throughout the temple grounds. So every courtyard, every meeting place was lit up by these candles.<sup>ii</sup> There were dozens and dozens of them throughout the temple facilities as they celebrated for several days.

So, imagine Jesus, standing in one of the courtyards of the temple, talking with a group of Pharisees and other Jewish leaders, with hordes of people standing and sitting around, (in fact several of the courtyards had "bleachers" for people to sit in during times of teaching and worship), and behind him and all around them are these candles, reminding them of God's presence... Reminding them of God's illuminating love, and that God is with them. This is not much different in meaning and intent with what we do every Advent with the lighting of our Advent candles.

And it's in this context that Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Jesus is taking the symbol for God that's right there before their very eyes and appropriating it to himself. It's as if he's saying, "These candles which represent and remind you of God's presence are great. But the real light of the world is standing before you, and I will never be extinguished, and will

always light the path of anyone who comes to me.”

Then, right after his “light of the world” claim, the Pharisees begin testing him and trying to discredit him, as they challenge the validity of his testimony. First, they allude to Old Testament law that said one person's testimony was not valid. Testimony in judicial matters was only valid if there were two or three people to give witness. Jesus responds by saying that his own testimony is in fact enough. Jesus knows where he came from, he knows how close he is to God his heavenly Father, and even if they don't want to trust him in this, that doesn't change the truth of the matter that his testimony is enough.

But, if they want another witness, he says that his Father is his witness, that He stands with the Father, who sent him. And while he doesn't say here how they could know that his heavenly Father bears witness to him, they can certainly see that Jesus' words and actions bear witness to God the father being with him. In other words, we know that the Father bears witness to the Son because of the miracles He does and the teaching that He gives. Those things couldn't happen if his Heavenly Father weren't with him and validating him. And then a little later, His resurrection demonstrates once and for all that His Heavenly Father is with him and bearing testimony to who Jesus is and demonstrating that yes: Jesus' testimony about who he is really is valid.

So even if some of the Pharisees didn't believe Jesus' claim that he is the light of the world, Jesus insists his claim is valid. And 10 verses later, in verse 30, John writes, “Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.” So the Pharisees who try to stone him a bit later aren't representative of all folks: many put their faith in Him.

The question for us, then, almost 2,000 years later is this: What does this mean that “Jesus is the light of the world,” and that if we put our faith in him we “will never walk in darkness”?

There are three things I want us to highlight for us this morning. First is that: **The light of Christ shines so that the darkness of sin and evil would flee from us.** The light of Christ casts out the darkness. When Jesus Christ is

present in our lives, sin becomes exposed, and in the face of the light it leaves. Sometimes we wonder, “Why do bad things happen?” Most people ask why they happen to good people...but “good” is really quite subjective, and no one is truly good all the time. Even the best people have lost their temper at their kids or a co-worker or their spouse...even the best people have broken some laws or made some regrettable decisions that hurt others. Jesus himself says that only God is good. So why do bad things happen? Why is there sin in the world? Why is there divorce? Why do we sometimes lose loved ones too early? Why are there people without a job who’d like one, or without a roof over their heads tonight, or nothing to eat? While there is no one simple answer to these kinds of questions, one piece of the answer is that: **The light of Christ is not allowed to shine in all parts of our lives and in all parts of this world.**

There is an interesting story that is not a true story, but illustrates this truth about the absence of Jesus Christ and the presence of evil. A University professor challenged his students with this question. “Did God create everything that exists?” One student bravely replied, “Yes he did!”

“God created everything?” The professor asked. “Yes sir, he certainly did,” the student replied. The professor answered, “If God created everything; then God created evil. And, since evil exists, and according to the principal that our works define who we are, then we can assume God is evil.” The student became quiet and did not answer the professor’s hypothetical definition. The professor, quite pleased with himself, boasted to the students that he had proven once more that the Christian faith was a myth.

Another student raised his hand and said, “May I ask you a question, professor?” “Of course,” replied the professor. The student stood up and asked, “Professor, does cold exist?”

“What kind of question is this? Of course it exists. Have you never been cold?” The other students snickered at the young man’s question. The young man replied, “In fact sir, cold does not exist. According to the laws of physics, what we consider cold is in reality the absence of heat. Absolute zero (-460 F) is the total absence of heat; and all matter becomes inert and

incapable of reaction at that temperature. Cold does not exist. We have created this word, cold, to describe how we feel if we have no heat.”

The student continued, “Professor, does darkness exist?” The professor responded, “Of course it does.” The student replied, “Once again you are wrong sir, darkness does not exist either. **Darkness is actually just the absence of light.** Light we can study, but not darkness. In fact, we can use Newton’s prism to break white light into many colors and study the various wavelengths of each color. You cannot measure darkness. So darkness is a term used by us to describe what happens when there is no light present.”

Finally the young man asked the professor, “Sir, does evil exist?” Now uncertain, but still convinced he was right, the professor responded, “Of course, as I have already said. We see evil everyday.” To this the student replied, “Evil does not exist, sir, or at least it does not exist unto itself. Evil is simply the absence of God. It is just like darkness and cold, a word that we have created to describe the absence of God. God did not create evil. Evil is the result of what happens when we do not have God’s love present in our hearts. It’s like the cold that comes when there is no heat, or the darkness that comes when there is no light.”<sup>iii</sup> The student then sat down. (Einstein in some renditions of it – though that is generally seen as an urban legend.)

Two points of clarification about this story. First, don’t infer from this that science is bad or wrong or anything like that. Science is simply the observation of the world and the rest of creation, and so science doesn’t show us anything that God doesn’t already know, since He created it all in the first place, and I do not believe that science and the Christian faith are in conflict with one another – which you’ve heard me say before over the last 5 ½ years. Second, I don’t profess that this story gives us a complete and total understanding of evil, and sin, and anything related to them. But it makes a good point, and illustrates the first thing for us to learn from this statement of Jesus’ that: **The light of the world, Jesus Christ, casts out darkness.** So when the light of Christ is removed or diminished from any sphere of life – when we don’t realize how much God loves us and the extent to which He’s gone to demonstrate that love and forgiveness...when we don’t reciprocate by loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, when we don’t

love our neighbors as ourselves, when grace and forgiveness are withheld, when we as a society don't allow the light of Christ into our lives and into this world, then the darkness creeps in, and evil has roots that begin to develop.

The second thing is this, and it's related to the first: **The light of Christ shows us the way to walk.** Have you ever been in a really dark place? I mean, a place that is so dark you can't even see your hand in front of your face? When Gwen and I lived in Seoul, we took a trip to another part of South Korea where we went on a guided tour of some caves. These weren't caves like you can stand at the mouth, look in, and see the end 50 or 60 feet in. These were networks of caves that went on for, I don't know, maybe a few miles – I don't remember. But these are long caves, with some twists and turns, that go way under ground. And I don't remember if lights had been installed to show the way or if we all had flashlights and headlamps or what...But I remember at one point all the lights were turned off. It was totally black. It was so dark, you could not see anything. Nothing. You couldn't see your own hand if your life depended on it.

Folks, *that* is dark. And when it's that dark, you have no idea where you are going. You can't see your feet, you can't see the ground, you can't see the people around you...it's dangerous to try and go anywhere. And similarly: **Without the light of Christ, we have no idea where we are going.** Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” That verse is about Scripture guiding our life. Scripture also tells us that Jesus is the “word of God” in flesh, and along with the written word, He lights the way for us so that we can know forgiveness, peace, and true life now and evermore. So that's point number two, that Jesus lights our path.

The third point for us to consider is this: **Jesus' disciples are called to reflect His light into the world.** In Matthew's gospel account he records Jesus' teaching that we are to “let your light shine before all people, so that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). The light that we shine, to whatever degree we shine it, isn't something we possess or can generate on our own, it's the light of Christ shining through us for the world to see. I think sometimes a helpful way to think of this is that

we reflect the light of Christ for the world to see.

In February of 1993, the Russian space program conducted an interesting experiment that they thought at the time would expand into greater usage.<sup>iv</sup> They placed into outer space a thin mirror made of aluminum and plastic, that was 65 feet in diameter. They set it in orbit for a few hours to reflect the light of the sun onto the parts of the earth that were experiencing the dark of night. They had some reasons for why they did this – none of which sounded very feasible to me like trying to turn darkness to more like dusk to save on energy costs, which is noble but I don't think feasible – but that's beside the point. Obviously, this happened 25 years ago, and nothing's come of it, so apparently they agreed with my conclusion, too. Anyway, the point is: **We are similarly created to reflect the light of Jesus Christ into the dark world around us.** We're like mirrors that reflect the light of Christ everywhere we go. Maybe it makes life more like dusk for a person, and not like broad daylight...but a little light is better than none at all, right?

So, who in your life could use more of the light of Jesus reflected off of you into their life? Who could use a little comfort as they grieve? Who could use some companionship in the midst of their loneliness? Who could use a little guidance and direction as they navigate their way through life? We all know people who are in challenging situations, and they badly need someone to reflect the light of Christ into their lives. Who will God send to come alongside people who are in darkness? It just might be you and me!

Of course: **We also need the Light of the World shining in our own lives.** Perhaps some facet of that light is needed in your life: the hope, the compassion, the forgiveness, the love of God in Christ...all of that is intended for you through Jesus, the Light of the World. Maybe some of you moms have kids that are really challenging and you need the light of Christ to give you wisdom and energy and patience in parenting them. I remember several years ago when my kids were younger we were going somewhere in the car. My oldest was playing a hand-held video game thing. Gwen and I were trying to get his attention to talk to him. I was driving, so Gwen was the one mostly trying to get him to put the game thing down. He kept saying "Just a sec" every time she asked. This happened probably a half-dozen times over

the course of a couple minutes – he just never felt he was at a good pausing point. “Just a sec....Just a sec...” On it went. Finally, Gwen had had enough and she responded to his last “Just a sec” with her own, “No more sec’s!” What she said, and what it sounded like she said were two different things! The kids were young enough, it went over their heads. But not Gwen’s and mine! We looked at each other as we realized what it sounded like she said, and I said to her, “What? Why are you dragging us into this?” ☺ So maybe some patience is needed, or clear thinking before you speak to your kids. Maybe some of you moms have lost a child and mother’s day is just a painful reminder of that absence and you need the light of Christ to bring comfort and compassion to you. Maybe there’s some forgiveness to be extended somewhere. Maybe some of you have or had a mom who really just didn’t do a good job of loving you and you need the light of Christ in your life to remind you that there is a God in heaven who loves you beyond what any of us could ever ask or imagine.

**So, This is what it means that Jesus is the light of the world: He casts out the darkness, he shows us the way, and He invites us to reflect that light out into the world.** I pray that Jesus, the light of the world would be the light of your life as well. That your faith would be placed in him, so you would know the hope, peace, forgiveness, love, and more that he offers. But you and I aren’t black holes where light goes into never to be seen again. Let the light reflect off of you and shine into the world, so that others would also know that Jesus really is the Light of the World, and the light of life. Let’s pray...Amen.

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i Often called “The Feast of Tents” because of the tents throughout the city and its surrounding communities that people would stay in who were there from out of town.

ii Might think of these more as “torches” than candles, or maybe what we would call an “oil candle,” with a strip of cloth functioning as the wick.

iii Obviously, I did not create this story. It was in my files and can be found online at a variety of places.

iv <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F0CE7DE143AF936A35751C0A965958260> (When I tried this link from the sermon, it took a couple minutes to load. Just a heads-up if you want to click on it and read the article.)