

“Jesus Alone, Light of the World”

John 8:12-20

December 20, 2020

It was a staggering claim Jesus made when he said, “I am the light of the world.” Who would make such a claim? A deranged person? An unstable person? Yet Jesus makes this claim, and *when* he makes this claim and *where* he makes this claim are significant!

Jesus said this at one of the most joyful, exciting festivals Israel celebrated. It was called the Feast of Tabernacles—sukkot (booths or tents)—for one week every year in the fall after harvest, the Jewish people would build tents to live in to remind them of the time when they came out of Egypt and had to live in makeshift shelters as God led them through the wilderness (Now in Jesus time, think how excited little Jewish boys and girls would get with the prospect of building a fort—a fort the whole family would live in for a week!) Think of it as a once-a-year national family camp week! How fun would that be? This last summer just before the awful fires, we were up at Detroit Lake with the whole family –one (picture), and every night we had a campfire, dancing, singing, laughing (describe Jerusalem swelling with thousands of families camping—one description I read years ago—hundreds of campfires like glowing amber jewels in the night all over the hills surrounding the Temple. At the Temple itself- four huge flaming menorahs needing

ladders—lit not only the courts of the magnificent limestone and marble Temple, but beyond—some priests would dance all night long with torches, and the whole Levite orchestra would be playing) This was the scene where and when Jesus uttered those words—“I am the light of the world.” (Tab. water and light ceremony)

John 8:12–20 (ESV)

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.” 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.”²⁰ These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple...

As you can see, these are words of conflict, and because John’s gospel is more thematic we have to go back to chapter 7:32 to get some of the back story: In the middle of the feast Jesus went to the Temple and started teaching and it created a stir!

People were divided over whom Jesus truly was. Is he the Christ? He can’t be, he comes from Galilee! Back and forth they went. So, the Pharisees caught wind of it, and sent Temple police to arrest him. But when the police go to arrest Jesus, he is speaking to the people and crying out:

John 7:37b–38 (ESV)

**“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.
³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ”**

After Jesus spoke these words, some of the people said he is the Prophet, others he is the Messiah, and others said, no he can’t be; he’s from Galilee! Then, as if there were not enough controversy and tension, the Temple police returned to the chief priests and Pharisees without Jesus in custody. They asked them, why didn’t you bring Jesus to

us? Why didn't you arrest him? And the police replied, "No one ever spoke like this man!"

Needless to say, the Pharisees didn't appreciate that! So they pulled out their we-are-the-experts card!

John 7:48 (ESV)

Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him?

If we, who are the experts, have ruled on the identity of Jesus, you need to get in line with us! Follow the experts! Wow! Does this sound a little bit familiar? Follow the experts, follow the science, "follow the yellow brick road"—we're off to see the wizard! Ah yes, we turn to the experts, many of who have had the curtain pulled back and have been exposed!

But—and here's the question we really must wrestle with—what if what Jesus is telling us about himself in John 8 is truly beyond anything with which the "experts" are familiar? In other words, what if Jesus here is making the argument that he has come into our world from a totally different world—a world in which the word of the "experts" can offer no final proof or validation? What if Jesus is saying to us, in the end, you can't

rely on the word of the experts. In the end, you yourself must respond to the Word made flesh; the light that has shined on your own dark places?

I believe this is precisely what is happening in John chapter eight! In so many words Jesus is telling his opponents, “I have taught and I have given you signs, and you have evaluated and interpreted my words and my works through the prism of your own darkened world. In fact, this is what Jesus means when he says to the Pharisees in John 8:15, “You judge according to the flesh.” Do you know these are the very same words the apostle Paul uses when he describes his pre-conversion experience of Jesus in 2 Corinthians 5:16? He says I used to know Jesus according to the flesh, or in other words, from my own, limited, worldly point of view. Now I don’t know him that way any longer! I see him differently.

Well let’s look more closely at the confrontation Jesus had with the experts—the Pharisees. After Jesus says, “I am the light of the world,” they challenged him: “You can’t just say that Jesus.”

John 8:13–14 (ESV)

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.

What’s going on here? In the law of Moses, it is stated that anyone convicted of a crime worthy of death must be convicted by the testimony of not less than two witnesses. Over time the Pharisees expanded on this and applied it to a number of situations. Here their rules came in handy. They are essentially telling Jesus that witnessing to his own claim does not constitute a valid witness, and it would appear they are using Jesus’ very own words against him. Why do I say this?

John 5:31 (ESV)

If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.

Here in John 8 he seems to say the very opposite— “Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true. In chapter 5:22 he says, “The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.” Here in chapter 8 Jesus says, “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.” Is Jesus contradicting himself all in the space of three chapters? No, not at all! What Jesus says in chapter 5 is consistent with what can be said from a limited, fallen, human perspective. Think about this: It is because the world we now live in is dark, distorted, and under delusion that it needs the corroboration of more than one witness! If we lived in a world where everyone told the truth, why would a second witness even be necessary? Here in John 8 we are dealing with something deeper. Here Jesus is making one of his final appeals, and he is making it clear He who is the light has come from the Father, and in this sense the light is its own witness. As the missionary to India Lesslie Newbigin put it:

“When the light shines in the darkness it cannot prove itself to be light except by shining.”

Lesslie Newbigin

If Jesus is the truth from above, in the final analysis nothing here below can serve as the ultimate validation.

Let me give you an example. Let’s assume you are an atheist, or perhaps an agnostic. We engage in a

discussion and we have a lively argument. I desperately want to convince you Jesus is the way, so I give you a book the title of which is “I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist!” (good book, impeccable logic) or maybe I recommend you read CS Lewis’s, *Mere Christianity*, or *God in the Dock*, or some of his other great writings. Will you come to faith on the basis of my arguments, arguments made in these books, or facts about Christianity from other sources? No, I don’t think so. In the end, it is just you and the light. You, and Jesus alone. Does that sound frightening? In the in the 23rd verse of John chapter 8—a little bit outside of our text Jesus said, “I am from above, you are from the world.” Herein lies our problem! On one hand, for many of us deep down inside we know we need to be rescued from ourselves. This time of year we sing the Christmas Carol, Oh Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel. I love that haunting melody—but do we really want God with us? Or let me make it more personal; do I really want God with me? I’m fairly certain I want God for me. I know this because often when I pray I give him quite a list of things I’d like him to fix for me, including people who don’t see things my way! God *for* me I get. But God *with* me poses a problem; because God with me means the light of God shining in all my dark places. Jesus doesn’t

do this to condemn me or judge me; but the fact that he has come into my world, our world, and that He the light has shined, and is still shining, is a judgment in itself. The question is now squarely in my corner: It is just Jesus and me; what will I do? What will you do?

Faith is not a leap in the dark, it is a leap toward the light. Faith is founded on facts, but at some point faith must take you beyond the facts to the one who Himself not only said, “I am the light of the world” but also “I am the truth!”