Jesus as Light

Big Idea: Jesus reveals to us who God is and who we are.
Purpose: To encourage people in the hope of salvation and to live a life of truth.
Passage: John 8:12-20 Verse: John 8:12

Light is a pretty great thing.
I’m reading a biography on Thomas Edison right now. I’ve been blown away by all that he invented in his lifetime. He made big improvements to how telegraphs, those machines that transmit morse code, operated. He started the first film studio in the world, and invented the machine that played the first motion picture in the United States.

The invention that first made him really famous was the phonograph—it was the precursor to the record player, and was revolutionary for its time.

But the thing that made Edison world renowned within his lifetime was his invention of an incandescent lightbulb that provided long-lasting, consistent light at just the right brightness. There were other lightbulbs around at the time, but Edison’s solved significant problems that other bulbs had and was much more affordable.

Not only did he invent the right lightbulb, but he also created an entire public electricity distribution system in order to make those lightbulbs function in homes and businesses around the world in a way that was generally affordable. Much of the world went from living in the semidarkness of gas and candle light to enjoying bright lights in their homes late at night. One person said of Edison, “He carried daylight into the night.”

Never mind that a little ice storm could change all of that in an instant for us.

Yes, light is a pretty great thing. And we appreciate it all the more when we lose it. We’ve become fairly accustomed to having access to light at any time, to the point that it becomes a little painful when it’s taken away from us.

I’m sure many of you lost power for some period of time a few weeks ago. We lost power for about three days, which is relatively short compared to many of you. Each morning was a little colder in our house, and I can’t tell you how many times I walked into a room and flipped on a light switch out of habit, only to get frustrated and stomp off somewhere to find a flashlight or lantern. I didn’t like having to operate, to live, to walk in darkness. It was limiting. I prefer to have light.

Yeah, light is a pretty great thing. Especially the right light.

We’re in our series on the Gospel of John called Encountering Jesus, where we’re looking at the metaphors that Jesus Himself uses and John uses to describe who Jesus is. So far, we’ve looked at...Jesus as Word - Jesus as Temple - Jesus as Well

This week, we’re going to see Jesus as Light. And we’ll see that Jesus reveals to us who God is and who we are.

Sarah will be reading our passage for today from John 8:12-20

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” The Pharisees challenged him, “Here you are, appearing as your own witness;
your testimony is not valid.”
Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one.
But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.
In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.”
Then they asked him, “Where is your father?”
“You do not know me or my Father,” Jesus replied. “If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his hour had not yet come.

We’re mostly just going to focus on verse 12 today—Jesus says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

There is so much happening in this passage, and so much richness drawn from the OT; I want to try to express it

It’s one of those statements from Jesus that feels like it just stands on its own. If it sounds familiar to you, it may be because you know this verse, or it may be because Jesus actually said something similar multiple times.

Just a little bit later, in John 9, Jesus says “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world,” (John 9:5)
And then in John 12, he says “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness,” (John 12:46)

So, what He’s saying must be important if he’s repeating it so much. But those phrases aren’t just linked to each other—each one was said in a context.

In Chapter 8, where we are today, Jesus seems to say it out of the blue, but it’s very much connected to where Jesus is, what’s happening at that time, and what people are saying to Him.

When He says this, Jesus is at the temple during the Festival of Tabernacles. Back in Chapter 7, it says that Jesus traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem for that festival, and about halfway through the festival, He began teaching where the offering is taken.

The Festival of Tabernacles was one of the three main festivals that the Lord told the Israelites they needed to observe. Moses said to the Israelites,

“Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose: at the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Tabernacles,” (Deuteronomy 16:16).

Some say it was the most important celebration throughout the year for the Israelites. The Festival of Tabernacles was all about remembering how, after the Lord had rescued the Israelites from Egypt, He had been with them as they wandered in the desert for 40 years.
During that 40-year wandering, they slept in temporary shelters. So, during the Festival of Tabernacles, the Israelites were to build a temporary shelter and sleep and eat in it for eight days. Even if they had a really nice house, during that week, they were to remember that God watched over their ancestors for 40 years in the wilderness while they slept in temporary shelters.

God also instructed them to celebrate the festival by waiving branches from trees like palms and willows.

It was a time of great celebration just after the harvest. And, eventually, light became a significant part of the celebration.

In the Talmud, the ancient Jewish commentary and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, it says that during the festival, “Golden candelabra were placed there, with four golden basins at the top of each; and four ladders were put to each candelabrum, on which stood four lads from the rising youth of the priesthood, holding jars of oil containing 120 lugs, with which they replenished each basin. The cast-off breeches and belts of the priests were torn into shreds for wicks, which they lighted...Pious and distinguished men danced before the people with lighted torches in their hands,” (Babylonian Talmud).

Basically, there were huge pillars, 75 feet tall, each with four basins on top full of old, oil-soaked clothes that were set on fire, while people danced around with torches in their hands. It produced a great amount of light at a time when there was obviously no electricity. The Talmud goes on to say, “There was not a court in Jerusalem that was not illuminated...A person could pick wheat by this light,” (Babylonian Talmud).

The Festival of Tabernacles was also interwoven into the fabric of the Old Testament. The themes of the festival appear in each of the major sections of the Old Testament, and it’s mentioned more than any of the other major festivals.

The Festival of Tabernacles was also called the Festival of Ingathering—as in a harvest, a bringing in, a gathering of the harvest. This became a metaphor for God ingathering, bringing in, His people from captivity. He was going to gather them to be His people. This is a recurring motif in major sections of the book of Psalms that talk about God gathering His people and gathering the nations to be His people as well.

This is something that was going to happen far in the future. And it’s something that the prophet Zechariah picked up on as well. He says “Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles,” (Zechariah 14:16).

The whole world was going to celebrate this Israelite festival year after year.
So the Festival of Tabernacles, where Jesus is saying this, holds a lot of weight for significant things to happen.

Not only was the Festival of Tabernacles rich with meaning when Jesus is there in the temple, but there were also other significant passages from the Prophets that give context to what Jesus is saying.

Just before Jesus says He is the light of the world, as He’s saying lots of other wonderful things in Chapter 7 of John, people start to say, this guy’s amazing—he must be the Messiah we’ve been waiting for! But others say, he’s from Galilee; the Messiah’s not coming from Galilee.

Ah, but Isaiah 9 says,

“Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan— The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned,” (Isaiah 9:1-2).

All this language sounds really familiar to what we see in John.

Then there were passages like Isaiah 60:

“The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end,” (Isaiah 60:19-20)

Edison may have carried day into night, but Edison can’t hold a candle to God...

Okay, I know I’ve just thrown a whole lot at you—even though it’s just scratching the surface of what’s really there—but this is how we understand the significance of what Jesus is saying.

So, picture this moment now. On what John says is “the last and greatest day of the festival;” there has been a week of massive celebration; huge pillars of fire and torches, dancing, shouting, as people rejoiced in God’s presence and provision in the past that would lead toward hope for salvation in the future. They’re remembering what God has done and they’re looking forward in hopeful anticipation for the Messiah, for the time when YHWH’s light will shine on them. This is not a quiet moment—this is a brimming moment.

It’s at this moment that Jesus says, “I am the light of the world”. I am the presence and the glory of God with you.

All those pillars of fire and torches that you’ve lit here are to depict the glorious presence of God in the past, in hopes of seeing it again in the future, but it’s here right now—I am the light of the world—I am the salvation that you hope for. All that God has promised has come to pass. And whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

By the time Jesus was done talking in the temple that day, the religious leaders picked up stones to kill Him.
Jesus, as the Light, was revealing who God is.

- God was faithful to His promises to rescue His people.
- God was also going to rescue the whole world, as He said He would.
- God had come in the flesh to tabernacle (as it says in John 1) with His people.

And everything that Jesus did revealed who God is. Jesus said that day, “I speak just what the Father has taught me.”

When we are talking about Jesus as Light, we must understand first and foremost that that is God fulfilling His promise to rescue us from sin and evil and brokenness, and to make us whole again in His presence.

And if you’re a follower of Jesus, even though you don’t walk in the light perfectly (and we’ll get to that), you have been rescued from darkness.

Paul wrote in Colossians,

> “[I give] joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins,” (Col. 1:12-14).

That has happened! We have been rescued from the dominion of darkness. We can encourage ourselves every day with that.

So that’s the first thing Jesus says—I am the light that reveals who God is.

But the second part of what he says reveals more about who we are.

He says “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life,” (John 8:12).

Although He doesn’t say it explicitly, there is this sense that we are to walk in the light—that’s what following Jesus would be—the opposite of walking in darkness. Don’t walk in the darkness, but walk in the light.

This tension, this contrast, between darkness and light is prevalent throughout the Bible, and a pretty common feature in John’s writings in particular.

Honestly, this metaphor of light and darkness is so ancient and so common that I think you and I can intuit most of what it means. The significant features of it in the Bible, particularly for John, hover around the contrast of sin and righteousness, truth and deceit, and salvation and condemnation.

There’s a passage in John that captures all of this pretty well. It’s from John 3:

> “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God,” (John 3:18-21).

So, if we believe in Jesus, we’re not condemned—we’re saved; we have eternal life, that is happening now, not something in the future. But where we still play around with darkness is with our sin and with our deceit.
Jesus said at the temple that day that if you know the truth of His teaching, that truth will set you free, but we don’t often feel the freedom to live fully in the light. See, I don’t like it when the power goes out and I have to fumble around in the darkness. But the darkness that Jesus is talking about provides some level of comfort for me. It allows me to hide who I am and what I do. But the light of Jesus reveals who I am.

John says people loved darkness instead of light because they’re afraid that their deeds will be exposed. Darkness gives the appearance of being in a safe place. It keeps us safe from...

- other people knowing that we don’t have it all together
- dealing with the consequences of our actions
- feeling shame in front of others for our sins

It provides a safe place for us to continue in our sin

Mostly, Darkness keeps us safe from people knowing us and not loving us

But darkness is deceptive; it doesn’t actually keep us safe—it hinders us; it limits us—just as anyone who lost power a few weeks ago felt limited in what we could do. When we choose to walk in darkness, we are limiting our relationships and our transformation into the image of Christ. When we hold back from others, we take away the opportunity for true intimacy in our relationships.

Think about this in the context of Covid. For the last year, many of us have been more isolated than we were before. And yet, when we come back together, there may still be parts of us that are isolated; the parts of us that we don’t reveal to anybody—that we keep in darkness.

The tension is that we all walk in the darkness to some extent—some more than others—and yet God is continually calling us further into the light, because darkness is deceptive

But light is the opposite of deception. In fact, light is truth. That’s why the light of Jesus reveals who I am.

Truth is a major theme in the Gospel of John. Jesus comes...

- being the truth,
- teaching the truth,
- requiring the truth,
- and revealing the truth.

And everyone else is trying to figure out, “What is the truth?”

Jesus wants to form truth in you and me with light, which is His own life. Remember, He is the light, and when we follow Him, we have the light of life. That is, we experience real life as God intended it when we walk in the light.

Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians,

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord,” (Eph 5:8-10)

So, how do we walk in the light and not in darkness? I think there’s more to that than what I’ll say, but I want to give you a few things to think about for walking in the light.
The first is the foundation: that is, to daily remind ourselves of our **SECURITY**. Remember that Jesus said at the Festival of Tabernacles that *the truth will set us free*.

I think **part of what it sets us free from is being dependent on what other people think of us**. Instead, we can be secure in God's love for us and in His desire for us to walk in the light. He wants us to live a life of truth, but it's so often our fear of other people that keeps us from living the truth.

Pastor John read this passage to some of the staff this week. It's Galatians 2:20, which is one of the first passages that I memorized as a Christian. But John read it from the Message, which I had never heard before. It says,

“*I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not “mine,” but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me,*” (Galatians 2:20, MSG).

**We need to remind ourselves of our security in Christ that frees us from the fear of what others think.**

And that's a big part of what we're doing in the season of Lent right now, as we prepare ourselves for the resurrection. We're turning back into the bigger story of God's salvation and finding our security as a beloved child of the Father.

The second way to walk in the light is **TRUST**

What I mean by this is that we need trusted relationships where we can practice the next thing I'm going to suggest, which is confession.

Walking in the light doesn't mean that I'm going to give you full disclosure at all times. There are appropriate times to have full disclosure and appropriate people with which to have it. But we need to trust someone with whom we don't have to hide any part of who we are. I would encourage every one of you to have that kind of a relationship, and if you don't, to work on building that kind of a relationship. It can be with a close a friend, a family member, a spouse, a therapist, or a spiritual director.

Again, from Galatians:

“*Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ,*” (Galatians 6:1-2)

The third way that we walk in the light is **CONFESSION**

1 John says, “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness,*” (1 John 1:9). Confession is a freeing thing. It's one of the strongest things we can do to break the hold of darkness in our lives.

When we don't confess—the more we conceal, the more we keep in secret, keep in the darkness, the stronger the hold of darkness on our lives.

You can confess to God; you can confess to a trusted individual; and we can confess corporately, which is how I want to end our service today.

If you're in a place where you can do so, I would recommend you read it out loud, or if you can't, you can say it in the silence of your heart.
Let us pray together this confession:

*When we allow darkness to overcome the light,*
*forgive us, Lord.*

*When we reduce Easter to plastic and candy,*
*have mercy on us, Father.*

*When hardness of heart keeps us from seeing*
*and hearing and touching the needs of others,*
*let your grace consume us, O God.*

*When the wars around us are of no concern,*
*forgive us, Lord, and move us to compassion*
*for those who suffer.*

*When our caring is not extended to action,*
*move us to seek justice for our brothers and sisters.*

*We come to confess our sinfulness*
*before you and before each other.*

*Remove all barriers that divide us,*
*and let there be no obstacle to our love for you*
*and for one another. Amen.*

Jesus is the Light of the world. He doesn’t want us to dwell on our sin, or be overwhelmed with guilt and shame. He wants to set us free from those things. We are forgiven through Christ, and those things we’ve confessed we can now let go of.

And let’s praise God together for that.