

“I Am the Light of the World”

John 8:12

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I have been serving here at Briarwood as the college pastor for the last 10 years and I'm thankful for the privilege to preach to you from the Word of God. Let's look at the passage for this study from John 8:12 which says [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."*

Prayer:

God, we thank You for Your Word and that we can learn from it. We thank You that you use it to equip us, teach us and draw sinners to yourself. You use it to bring people who are in darkness to light. We praise You for that and pray that You would speak to our hearts. Renew our minds, help us to know You, love you and glorify You. Help us to shine like lights in this dark world for Your glory. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to serve on the host committee for General Assembly that was held in Birmingham where I live. Because I was on this committee, I was given a hotel room by the conference center so for the week I was there my family was at home because it was only a room for myself. My wife was back home being like a single parent with four kids so that I could be fully engaged with the assembly. When I come home from the assembly, I see my kids doing various activities but I don't see my wife. So, I ask my kids 'Where's mom?' and they say 'she is in the bathroom cleaning.' I thought that was kind of weird but as I get closer to the bathroom, I can smell the bleach which is her favorite kind of cleaning component. I noticed something strange – the door was closed and the lights were off. Something is bound to happen when you are gone from home for more than 24 hours when you have four kids. There is a high chance that one of the kids did something to push mom over the edge.

I asked my wife if everything was okay and she said 'Yes, I'm fine, I'm just cleaning the bathroom.' I said 'Why are the lights off and the door closed?' She said 'There is just so much darkness in here and I'm trying to get it all cleaned up. I've been working for hours. I've tried all kinds of cleaners to clean this darkness up and nothing will work.' I'll stop my story right here because we all know this is a little ridiculous because there is no amount of effort that can take away darkness. There is only one thing that can rid my bathroom of darkness and its light. To do that you have to open the door, or turn on the lights or open the blinds. Light is the only thing that has the power to dispel the darkness.

I'm sure each and every one of us at some point in our life has seen the power of the light dispel darkness. One of my favorite times is when I have been out at the lake, getting up early before the sun comes up and looking out over the water. Then the sun starts to rise. It dispels the darkness immediately. It's beautiful and powerful.

One of the most powerful pictures to me of light dispelling darkness is right here at Briarwood during our Christmas Eve service when we have the candle lighting time at the end of the service. Our pastor lights one candle before all the lights are turned off and it goes completely dark. That one little candle then begins to light up the auditorium and then he lights candles of the staff who then in turn go and light the candles of those in the congregation.

Before you know it, the whole sanctuary is lit up again by all these individual candles being held up and it fills the sanctuary with light, then it dispels all the darkness.

Jesus tells us that He is the light of the world and whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Why does Jesus tell us this and why does He use this language? We know from John 7 that Jesus makes this claim about Himself on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacle. We see He was standing in the treasury of the temple which was also known as the simple court of women. It had a big courtyard area where all the people would gather and both of these facts are important to understand what Jesus was claiming about Himself.

The Feast of Tabernacle was a celebration of God's deliverance from Egypt, His protection and provision in the wilderness. During this feast there were two ceremonies that took place every day. One was the pouring out of the water daily by the priest onto the altar and it was to remind the people how God provided water for them from the rock out in the desert. The second was called the illumination of the temple that took place in the temple court of women. Each night four tall golden torches were set up and some historians say they were as high as the temple walls. Young priests would climb the ladders and fill the bowls for the torches with 65 liters of oil and then light the torches. These torches represented God as the Great Pillar of fire and led the people during their 40-year journey in the wilderness. The torches would illuminate the whole temple and much of Jerusalem. One ancient scholar said there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect their light. The people would gather under the light as they danced and celebrated all through the night until dawn.

This is the context where Jesus declares "I am the Light of the world, whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." For the Pharisees and others listening to Jesus there would be no mistake or misunderstanding about what Jesus was declaring about Himself. He is declaring that He is God and that He is the One who delivered them from slavery and protected them from that Egyptian army. He was that pillar of light that guided them and protected them in the wilderness. He was also declaring that He was the expected Messiah, the Savior of the world, the light of the nations.

Isaiah says in Isaiah 49:6b, *[6b] I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.* Isaiah 60:3 says *[3] And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.* Malachi 4:2a says *[2a] But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.* It is in light of this bold declaration by Jesus that He says 'whoever follows Me...'

So, what does it mean to follow Jesus? It is important for us to look at how Israel followed the pillar of light in the wilderness during the 40 year wandering. We will look at Number 9 to get this background of what Jesus was declaring.

Number 9:15-23 says *[15] On the day that the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony. And at evening it was over the tabernacle like the appearance of fire until morning. [16] So it was always: the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night. [17] And whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, after that the people of Israel set out, and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the people of Israel camped. [18] At the command of the LORD the people of Israel set out, and at the command of the LORD they camped. As long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. [19] Even when the cloud continued over the tabernacle many days, the people of Israel kept the charge of the LORD and did not set out. [20] Sometimes the cloud was a few days over the tabernacle, and according to the command of the LORD they remained in camp; then*

*according to the command of the LORD they set out. [21] And sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning. And when the cloud lifted in the morning, they set out, or if it continued for a day and a night, when the cloud lifted they set out. [22] Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer time, that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, abiding there, the people of Israel remained in camp and did not set out, but when it lifted they set out. [23] At the command of the LORD they camped, and at the command of the LORD they set out. They kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by Moses.*

Here you see that their every movement was dictated by God. If God moved, they moved. If God stayed, they stayed. Israel's following was marked by an ongoing continual submission and obedience. Their focus was supposed to be on the pillar, not on themselves, their circumstances or on the world around them. This reminds me a lot of my personal testimony. I grew up in the church. I knew a lot about God and also knew I was walking in darkness. I was focused on myself and what would satisfy and fulfill me – sports, parties, girls. I used each of these things to try and dispel the darkness in my life. It didn't work and I just found more darkness. Halfway through my junior year in high school I realized it wasn't working. I was miserable.

So, I made my focus trying to clean up the focus in my life. I tried not to do these bad sinful things and tried to do good moral things. I even made a list of what those things were and tried harder and harder but it didn't work. I was still miserable while looking for the light of life. It wasn't until the summer before my senior year in high school that someone shared with me Luke 9:23 which says [23] *And He said to all, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."* At that moment I told that person that I just denied myself and I was following Jesus but the more I thought about the words of Christ I realized I wasn't really following Jesus. I had never really followed Jesus. At best, I was just trying to avoid the darkness and trying to clean up the darkness in my life. I didn't really want His deliverance or to guide me, protect me or comfort me in this world. When I was honest with myself, I just wanted to live my life for me. I said I had followed Jesus, claimed to be a Christian but in reality, I just followed me and this broke me. I realized my whole life was a lie.

I then gave up and surrendered my life to Jesus. I pledged my allegiance to Him alone and started following Him. I began to make it my whole life focus to follow Jesus and that is what Jesus is called the people to in the temple court. This is what He is calling all who are reading this to as well. He wants us to follow Him – the Light of the world – submit ourselves to Him, pledge our allegiance to Him, trust and obey Him. Make this the whole focus of your life. We can't miss this point.

The call of Jesus is to not walk in darkness or try to get the light of life, but the call of Jesus is to follow Jesus. This is an ongoing daily call as He said in Luke 9:23. What is the result of making the focus of your life following Jesus? Jesus gives us two promises. First, is that you will not walk in darkness. One pastor said it like this; 'It is Jesus or darkness for these are the only two options in this world – follow Jesus or remain in darkness.' What is this darkness that Jesus is talking about? Jesus is talking about the human condition.

This past week one of my daughters had her first catechism camp with our children's ministry here at Briarwood Presbyterian. This is one of my favorite things that our children's ministry does because it instills all these foundational Biblical truths in the hearts and minds of our children and they need it. Many of these things I didn't learn or hear until I was in my mid 20s.

So, what does this have to do with the human condition and the darkness Jesus is talking about? It has everything to do with it. Here are some questions and answers from the catechism camp. Question 21 says, in what condition did God make Adam and Eve? Answer – He made them holy and happy. Did they remain that way? No, because they sinned. They didn't trust and obey God. Question 33; What befell our first parents when they had sinned? Answer – Instead of being holy and happy, they became sinful and miserable. What effect does this have on me and you? Question 35; What effect had the sin of Adam on all mankind? Answer – All mankind are born in a state of sin and misery. The last catechism question I want to share to get the point across is Question 37; What does every sin deserve? Answer – The wrath and curse of God. This is the human condition – the darkness – and the light of the world, Jesus, came to expose this and rescue us from.

We are born in a state of sin and misery and we deserve the wrath of God. We deserve hell which is God's wrath and judgment for all eternity in outer darkness. We need the light of the world, Jesus, to expose and free us of our sin for there is no other way to see our sin and be forgiven of our sin. I want to be clear here – Jesus is the only way. There is no amount of effort that can remove the darkness of our sin and from our lives.

The darkness also affects the way we know and see the world around us. We need the light of the world to understand and see the world clearly. We will never understand the things of the world or see things clearly without the light of the world, but with the light of the world we can begin to understand the world and know Jesus. We can have confidence that God is working all things for our good and we can have confidence that we will not suppress the truth and knowledge about Him or exchange the truth about Him for a lie. We can continue to grow into His image and likeness. God's Word promises us that the darkness has not and will not overcome the light, but this doesn't mean we won't experience the effects of living in a dark, fallen world. We will still experience the effects of the darkness through suffering, pain, persecution and even physical death, but we can have confidence that the light of the world will never be overcome by darkness and we will never experience eternal darkness.

The second result of following Jesus is that you will have the light of life. Think about this for a second. Those who follow Jesus will not just see the light of life but we will actually possess it. This is key because those who possess the light of life can have confidence that Jesus will guide them in this life and in the life to come – eternal life.

Lastly, we possess this light to be a light in the dark world. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:15, *[15] that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.* Paul also tells the Ephesian church in Ephesians 5:8-9, *[8] for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light [9] (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).*

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:14-16, *[14] "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

What should be our response to Jesus' claim and call on our lives? Will you be like the Pharisees who keep trying to clean the darkness out of their lives with rules, regulations and their own efforts or will you be offended by Jesus' bold claims and tell Jesus that His witness about Himself is untrue? Or will you submit to the light of the world and follow Him?

For those who are following Jesus, who are all in, these words from Kent Hughes I think will challenge and encourage you as I conclude this study. Hughes says “If you are going through difficult and hard times, if you are confused as a believer, there is a good chance that you again need to submit to God.” I would encourage you to do what is implied here. You need to stay under the Pillar. You must not run ahead of the Pillar or stand behind it – you must stay under it and that requires faith and submission to the will of God.

I don’t know all of what you are going through but for many there are lots of challenges and hard times going on right now. I know in my own life when things get sideways, hard, and out of whack, many times it’s really simple – I just need to get back on my knees and resubmit my life to Him – put myself back under that Pillar, Jesus, because many times I want to get ahead of God and I don’t want to stay under Him or submit to Him. I tend to want to do my own thing, but I have to recommit to put my faith and trust in Him and His will for my life.

To others reading this you might be like how I was when I was growing up where you know a lot about God and say you’re a Christian but you have never followed Him, if you’re really honest with yourself. You know a lot about Him, you know the verses and you know how to play the game but you never really submitted yourself to Him. Or you are working really hard. We live in this American culture where we can pull our boot straps up and try harder and think we can clean our lives up as if we can clean up the darkness from our lives with your own effort. It doesn’t work – I’ve been there and all you will find is more darkness. Look to Jesus – follow Him – submit to Him and as you do He promises that you will not walk in darkness and you will have the light of life. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father God, we thank You so much for Your Word. Lord, we know we live in a dark world. We know that we have been pulled from the darkness into the light and we’re so grateful for that Lord. Thank You Jesus for opening the eyes of our hearts that we can see You, that we can see Your light and follow You. Lord, I pray for those reading this today that haven’t followed You or haven’t submitted to You or maybe those who are struggling or getting ahead of You or not wanting to submit to You or be under You – I pray that they would stop and get down on their knees to pray to You to commit or recommit to following You, putting themselves under You – the Pillar of light to lead, guide and direct them. I pray these things in Jesus’ holy Name, Amen.