

Jesus, the Light of the World

John 8:12-30

Warm-up Question: When was the last time you lost your electricity at night? What was it like groping around in the dark? Once you found a light source (flashlight, candle, etc.) ... how did things change?

Alternative Warm-up Question: As a kid ... were you ever afraid when you parents turned off the lights? How about your children?

¹² 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." ¹³ The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid." ¹⁴ 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." ¹⁵ You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. ¹⁶ But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. ¹⁷ In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. ¹⁸ I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me." ¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come. ²¹ Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come." ²² This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?" ²³ But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." ²⁵ "Who are you?" they asked. "Just what I have been claiming all along," Jesus replied. ²⁶ "I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world." ²⁷ They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. ²⁸ So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. ²⁹ The one

who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." ³⁰ Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him (John 8:12-30).

The Light of the World

Verse 20 of this passage helps us picture the scene of the passage we are studying today. It is up on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, there in the Court of the Women. This area was on the eastern side of the temple where the trumpet shaped bronze offering receptacles were kept. According to the Mishnah (Middoth 2, 5), the Court of the Women was just over 200 feet square with a colonnade running around the court. Against the wall were the thirteen trumpet shaped containers for voluntary offerings of money, narrow at the mouth and wide at the bottom for the various offerings of the Jews. This passage does not tell us the timing but it seems as if it is still during the Feast of Tabernacles. There were two great ceremonies at this particular feast. The first one was the pouring out of the water on the Altar of Burnt Offering. At that time, just after the crowd had shouted to the priest to lift the chalice containing the water higher, before he poured it upon the altar; Jesus had shouted out for all to hear, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:37-38). The second ceremony was called the Illumination of the Temple. In the Court of the Women were four large candelabra's or candlesticks. The Mishnah (Sukkah 5:2-3) tells us that each candlestick had four great golden bowls with a ladder at each, enabling the younger priests to climb up and fill the bowls with oil and set them alight when it got dark. Because the Temple Mount was the highest point in the city, it is said that the blaze of the candlesticks lit up most of Jerusalem. They were commanded by God to celebrate for seven days (Numbers 29:12), so all night long there were dancing and rejoicing before the Lord. It could very well be that at twilight, as the young priests were lighting the lamps, Jesus said the words, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Notice that He didn't say, I am a light or even

one of the lights, but the statement is exclusive, “I am the light of the world.” The Pharisee’s were listening in, which again says a lot about the character of Jesus—He didn’t say these things just to His disciples. He spoke to all people as to who He was, whether they were for Him or against Him. These things were not spoken in a corner, but Christ courageously spoke the truth and let the chips fall where they may. He was not fearful of speaking the truth in the slightest. The Pharisee’s immediately challenged Him because they understood that it was a claim to divinity. The Lord had spoken to them a number of times that He was their light, “The Lord is my light” (Psalm 27:1). “The Lord will be your everlasting light” (Isaiah 60:19). “By his light I walked through darkness” (Job 29:3).

When God had begun to deal with the Egyptian nation because of their using the Israelites as slaves, He darkened all of Egypt, but where the Israelites lived, they had light (Exodus 10:21-23). After their deliverance from Egypt, when Pharaoh and his soldiers chased them to wipe out Israel at the Red Sea, God brought darkness to the Egyptians but to the Israelite side, there was light (Exodus 14:19-20). **Christ Himself was the angel of the Lord, a preincarnate appearance of Christ**, that watched over Israel providing them bread from heaven, water from the Rock and light in the darkness while they crossed the Red Sea:

¹ For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

No matter what darkness you have to walk through, Christ will be your light.

What did Jesus mean when He said, “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness?” (verse 12).

Hopefully you have come to a point in your life where you have asked the big questions of yourself, “Who am I? What am I here for? What reason do I have for living? Where am I going?” These kinds of questions can be depressing if you do not know the Light of the World, Jesus the Christ. When a person is in darkness, he cannot see the next step before him. One blunders

around trying to find out where to go. In the same way, a person who comes to Christ begins to understand who he is, what he is living for and where he is going. Light is a picture of knowledge, whereas darkness speaks of ignorance and the things of this world. The more light or knowledge a person acquires, the less stumbling through life he experiences.

There are times in our lives, when we go through great difficulties, when everything seems dark. When we lose a loved one it seems as if the darkness is crowding in. When we are sick, and want to just lie in bed, or even hope to die, it is often because we have no hope and no light—no reason to live. These are the times when God wants to reveal Himself to you in a special way, if you will seek Him and ask Him. He will not come where He is not invited. He has given each of us the will to choose to walk towards the light or to stay in darkness. Coming to Him and learning of Him will bring us much light to walk through difficult times—seek to know Him intimately. It is written of Jesus, that “by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities (Isaiah 53:11).

Many people experience darkness in their lives by not following Christ. Some of you were Christians when you experienced dark times, but can I ask you if you were following Him wholeheartedly? Jesus said that, “whoever follows me will never walk in darkness” (verse 12). We are to submit ourselves to His guidance, and take our direction from His model of living, listening to His voice and meditating on His Word.

Many times Christians who are really walking with Him have to endure painful situations, where God is teaching perseverance and creating character in us. These painful situations are caused, not by our forsaking Him, but because we are walking closely with Him. The scripture says, “The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all” (Psalm 34:19). It is not enough to look at this light in the midst of our troubles, or even to gaze on Him. We must follow hard after Him, for His light is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). Often times, we would like to see far down the road of life, but God has only promised light for the next step, not the next mile or the next year, just the next step. Why is that, you may ask? The reason is that He wants us to trust Him in the difficult times of darkness.

I went through three and a half years when I could not

receive wages as a pastor in Cincinnati while I went through four immigration trials that lasted all those years. That situation came about because I had confessed to two minor marijuana convictions on my Immigration forms for residency when I married Sandy, my American wife. The marijuana convictions were committed in England when I was 17 and 21 years of age several years before I became a Christian. Every day seemed dark while I went through the Immigration Court process. I was threatened that if I didn't leave my family and the United States voluntarily, I might be hauled off and sent back to my home country of England away from my American family and would not be able to reapply for a work visa for 10 years. I had two lawyers; both of them told me that to stay with my family in the USA was not possible. They both told me that they could not get me residency in the USA and that it was impossible to get through my situation without having to leave the country. The most that they could do was to give me time and drag it out. I had to trust God for finances while I continued to do my regular job, but as a volunteer. God had other plans for me as I took it one day at a time, and looked to His light in the midst of my pain and confusion as to what He wanted from me. Each court appearance brought further darkness as it was put off until several months later. It seemed it would never end. At the fourth court appearance, I was so broken that I pleaded with the judge and the court not to have this continue much longer because of the hardship that my family had to endure. It was a terrible experience as we had to continue to fight to stay together as a family. Yes, pastors have to endure times of darkness too. Again, I say, the righteous may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

What years of your life have been the darkest and why? What happened to bring light?

Light vs. Darkness

There is often a clash of kingdoms when light is manifest. Within just the few days of the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jews had witnessed Jesus' testimony about Himself being the giver of the living water (John 7:38), the love and mercy towards the woman caught in an act of adultery (John 8:1-11), and now they hear His testimony about Himself, that He is the Light of the world. When light is revealed, those who are called of God will come to the light, while those who have set them-

selves against the light draw back into darkness:

¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ 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 3:19-21).

There are those that consciously attack the light and those that are passive in walking away from the light. Some, for various reasons in their lives at the time, draw back for a time, but later come to the light because of seeing something that has attracted them to that light. When you stand up for your faith and shed the light of Jesus Christ, you will find some that are interested and are hungry and thirsty for more, but you will also find many who initially draw back and some that attack vociferously. Here in this passage we see the rejection among the Pharisees. Chuck Swindoll, in his excellent commentary, brings out the stages of the Jewish leadership's rejection culminating in violence:

1. Contradiction. "Your witness is not true" (verse 13).
2. Cynicism. "Where is your father? We were not born of fornication (8:19, 41).
3. Denial. "We have never enslaved anyone" (verse 33).
4. Insult. "You are a Samaritan. You have a demon" (verse 48).
5. Sarcasm. "Who do you make yourself out to be?" (verse 53).
6. Violence. "They took up stones to throw at Him" (verse 59).¹

Did you ever speak unkindly to someone who shared light with you? Or have you ever had someone respond to you with any of the above? Share with one another.

The Consequences of Rejection of Christ

Life has many opportunities that come to us. Opportunities to make money, to go into business, to take a step up in one's work, opportunities to educate oneself further, but there are certain opportunities that do not return. These Pharisees had an opportunity to come to the Light of Christ, and they chose to harden their

¹ Charles Swindoll, Swindoll's New Testament Insights on John, Zondervan Publishers, Page 167.

hearts to the opportunity. The trouble with closing our hearts to the love of Christ and the gospel is that if we do get another opportunity, the voice is quieter, because of our hearts being hardened towards Him. God often has to break us to soften our hearts enough to receive His word. Jesus told them that they would die in their sin (verse 21). He said He was going away and that there would come a time when they would look for Him and it would be too late, the door of salvation would be shut and they would not be able to come in. Many believe that this life is all there is, and that when you die, that's it! How the enemy of God, Satan, loves to hear that thinking! But life is not really like that. We are eternal creatures that only inhabit a body for a certain amount of time, as God determines it. Every day is an opportunity to get to know the Savior and be changed into His image and character (2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 8:29).

To make sure that those in front of Him knew exactly what they were doing, He said it again: 24I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins” (verse 24). He told them categorically just who He was claiming to be, the Messiah Sin Bearer of Israel, the one who was prophesied to take away their sins, the one spoken about by the prophet Isaiah in chapter 53 of his prophecies, more than 500 years earlier. To die in your sins and reject God's free payment for your sins means that you have to pay with your eternal life yourself, forever rejected. How terribly sad! The writer to the Book of Hebrews puts it this way, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). There are those who think that if they miss the rapture that there will be a second chance, albeit a really hard time while they go through the Tribulation of the last days. I believe this to be a false hope that would make it very dangerous if a person believes such a message. We must not harden our hearts while there is still today to respond to the gospel.

²³ Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” He said to them, ²⁴ “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵ **Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’** “But he will answer, ‘I don't know you or where you come from.’” ²⁶ “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’”

²⁷ “But he will reply, ‘I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’” ²⁸ “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. ²⁹ People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last” (Luke 13:23-30).

I don't find the slightest hope in the passage above that the opportunity that is open today will still be good at the coming of Christ for His church. Once the owner of the house gets up, the door of salvation is shut! Never to be opened. Many will try to enter that day, realizing that there really is a God and that there is an eternity before all of us. If today your heart is open to Him, is there any good reason as to why you shouldn't receive Him and His full and free salvation? What would stop you? It is madness to draw back into the darkness! (Ecclesiastes 9:3).

What does Jesus mean when He says, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one?” (John 8:28).

It is very possible that those who were resistant to His loving and gracious words were some of the very ones who would be around the cross gloating at His death. At the cross, there were those who were still hardened in their rejection of Him, ³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One” (Luke 23:35). But imagine what it was like when He cried out in a loud voice the words, “It is finished” (John 19:30). What it was like for those hard hearted Jewish leaders when they experienced the earthquake at His death, the darkness over all the land, the temple curtain, that separated man from God's presence, being torn in two from top to bottom, and the tombs opening up around them and many holy people being raised to life, coming out of their tombs and walking around Jerusalem for all to see (Matthew 27:50-54). I think then that many of them at last knew that He is the One. Do you know yet that He is the One?

Jesus, God in the flesh, came into the world to save sinners such as you and me. He came to pay the debt of sin that you owe. He came to deliver you from the guilt and shame of sin, and to give you the gift of eternal life. I trust that you too have seen that before a holy God

you see yourself in need of a Savior. Light has come into the world, but do you love the darkness more than the light? He has said that to respond to the gospel and receive the gift of life, you need to receive Him into your life:

¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).

²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me (Revelation 3:20).

Will you receive Him today as Savior and Lord of your

life? Entrust your whole being to Him with a simple prayer such as:

Prayer: "Father, I know that I have broken your laws and my sins have separated me from you. I am truly sorry, and now I want to turn away from my past sinful life toward you. Please forgive me, and help me avoid sinning again. I believe that your son, Jesus Christ died for my sins, was resurrected from the dead, is alive, and hears my prayer. I invite Jesus to become the Lord of my life, to rule and reign in my heart from this day forward. Please send your Holy Spirit to help me obey You, and to do Your will for the rest of my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen."