

Light of the World John 8:12-30 www.bible-sermons.org November 2, 2008

Last week I explained how the story of the adulterous woman was inserted into the text of the Gospel of John. The passage today picks up where the claim of being the source of living water left off. That story was intricately involved with what took place during the Feast of Sukkoth, as is our passage for today. The water ceremony took place first thing in the morning. The lighting ceremony took place in the evening. Perhaps it was mid-day when the story of the adulterous woman took place, but it breaks the flow of these amazing claims of Jesus in connection with the Feast. So as we look at the passage today, I encourage you to look at it as taking place the evening of the John 7 account. The verse that ends chapter 7 and begins chapter 8 describes people going home after this morning declaration and confrontation. That is not what typically happened during Sukkoth.

For the Feast of Sukkoth, four enormous candelabrum were placed in the Court of the Women. That is the first court inside the Temple itself, the same court that contains the altar. These candelabrum were higher than the surrounding walls. Each evening the large bowls on top of three of them were filled with oil and then lit. Being the highest point in Jerusalem, it was said that their light illuminated every courtyard in the city. As the women watched from the balconies, "men of piety and good works used to dance before the oil lamps with burning torches in their hands, singing songs and praises... countless Levites played on harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets and instruments of music" (Mishnah Sukkot 5:4)

The meaning of the lights was abundantly clear to all the worshipers. They were celebrating the Feast of Sukkoth (Booths or Tabernacles) and had built their little shelters to remind them of the time when God led their forefathers through the wilderness. What led them? It was the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. (Exodus 13:21) These candelabrum represented that light, but they also represented another light, the one that filled the Holy of Holies, the Shekinah Glory. (Exodus 40:34) I haven't found any teaching as to why there were four lights, but I would guess they represented the burning bush (Exodus 3:2), the pillar of fire, the Shekinah, and the coming Great Light (*Ha'or Gadol*). Isaiah predicted this coming Light would not only restore Israel, but also be a light to the Gentiles, or we would say to the world. (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6)

That fourth candelabrum, or Great Light, was not lit until the last night of the weeklong feast. It was a symbol of the nation waiting for the full salvation that God would one day bring. It was probably either when they were preparing to light that candelabrum or the next morning when it was extinguished that Jesus' voice rang out, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* Once again, Jesus interpreted the symbolism to apply to Him, personally. When you read the passage you don't get the full impact and shock value of the statement unless you understand what was taking place during the Feast. This was a jaw dropper and no doubt infuriated the religious leaders once again.

Commented [notes1]: 21 By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.

Ex 13:21 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 34 Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Ex 40:34 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.

Ex 3:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 6 "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, Isaiah 42:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 6 he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." Isaiah 49:6 (NIV)

You could make the claim that Jesus was just saying He was a great rabbi. It was said of other rabbi that they were a light to the world. (Yohanan ben Zakkai) But when you connect it with the lighting of the fourth candelabrum, then it takes on a much greater significance. We know it is the last day of the feast from [John 7:37](#), and that is why it is connected with Isaiah's prediction of a Light to the world. The Isaiah prophecies that spoke of the Light foretold the restoration of Jacob, of God taking Israel by the hand, and making this One a covenant for the people. He went on to predict this Light would bring salvation to the ends of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6)

Commented [notes6]: 37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." John 7:37 (NIV)

There Jesus was, standing in their midst, declaring that He was the One this last candelabrum anticipated. *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* Light for the world, the Light that would bring salvation to the ends of the earth, was standing among them. And just as the claim that followed Jesus' invitation to the spiritually thirsty was followed by a promise of living water springing up in everyone that came to Him ([John 7:38](#)), so this declaration is followed by a promise. Our path will be illumined, and we will have the light of life. (Psalm 36:9)

Commented [notes7]: 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." John 7:38 (NIV)

The word is said to be a light to our path. (Psalm 119:105) Jesus is the word made flesh; therefore, He could make such an incredible claim. This is like the earlier claim that if you just tried to live His teachings you will know that they are from God. ([John 7:17](#)) Just follow the Light and you will have the light of life. But you have to follow Him.

Commented [notes8]: 9 For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. Psalms 36:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Psalms 119:105 (NIV)

Notice that the invitation is to "whoever" will follow. This fits in with the Isaiah's prediction about the One being a light to the Gentiles. As with the invitation of coming to Jesus to quench spiritual thirst, consider anyone else declaring themselves to be the light of the world and promising that if you follow them you will have the light of life. Coming from the lips of anyone else, it would be absurd. No one would want to make such a claim unless they could back it up. It would have to be arrogance, insanity or honesty. Every follower of anyone making the claim falsely would immediately know the person was a fraud. Only Jesus can make the claim, because only He can back it up.

Commented [notes10]: 17 If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. John 7:17 (NIV)

¹³ *The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."* They couldn't let a declaration like that go unchallenged. If they really were certain He was a fraud, why didn't they say, "Go ahead, follow Him. You'll soon find out He can't deliver!?" So instead, they bring up the legal standard requiring two witnesses. (Deuteronomy 19:15) The last time that argument came up (chapter 5) Jesus told them John the Baptist, His works, the Father, and the Word all testified of Him. This time Jesus only brings up the Father, but first He told us all why we should listen to Him.

Commented [notes11]: 15 One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. Deut 19:15 (NIV)

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.* We should listen because He came

Commented [notes12]: 31 "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. 32 There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid. John 5:31-32 (NIV)

from heaven and will return to heaven. We should listen because Jesus does not speak like men speak, with the mere wisdom of men. The Greek for that last phrase is simply, "I and He who sent me." God the Father is with Him. They were judging Jesus' words by human standards. He was listening to God!

Then Jesus addressed their accusation about not having anyone to testify that He was true. 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.*" In this chapter we have a number of times when Jesus uses the "I am" phrase. The Greek for verse 18 is literally, "I Am testifies for myself." He may have been hinting at His deity. (Isaiah 43:10) Jesus began to distance Himself from their religiosity by calling it "your" law. The Jews of that day had a Biblical requirement needing two witnesses to convict of a capital crime but had expanded it to everything else unless only one witness was specifically stated. They had messed with what God said by their traditions.

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."* The ancient East used the same expression we have, "Like father, like son." If they could get Him to say God was His father, they could accuse Him of blasphemy. They refused to get to know Jesus, and in doing so they were refusing to know God. Many do the same today. If you want to know God, you must get to know the Son who is the exact representation of the Father. (Hebrews 1:3)

Verse 20 tells us He was near the treasury that was in the Court of the Women where the great lights were placed.

In verse 21, He again told them that He was going away. It was important for the people to understand that He wasn't setting up a physical kingdom now. The phrase "die in your sins" meant that they would have to face the judgments of God. Unless they came to Jesus, who is the only atonement that God accepts, they would die in their sinful state. They didn't want to hear that. They thought that observing all their rituals was good enough. What they weren't seeing was that all the Biblical rituals point to Jesus.

In verse 22, they suggest He is saying that He will kill Himself. I doubt they really believed that. It was another way of slandering His character. The Jews thought that suicide was deplorable. If someone committed suicide their body was left in place until evening and not openly mourned. They believed the person was disqualified from entering the coming age and that God would deal harshly with their children. To say that Jesus would kill Himself was to slander His character.

They had turned things upside down. They were calling the holy vile and the vile righteous. (Isaiah 5:20) Jesus responded by telling them the truth. ²³ *But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.* Though Jews did believe in the darkness of the deep where there is judgment, John uses "below" to mean morally deficient. There is a link in Jesus' teaching with being from beneath and impending judgment from God. He

Commented [notes13]: Hebrews 1:3 (NIV)
3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Commented [notes14]: 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.
John 8:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 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."
John 8:21 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 22 This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come?'"
John 8:22 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.
Isaiah 5:20 (NIV)

graciously warned them about that judgment again. 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.* Here again we have the "I am" declaration. NIV adds "the one I claim to be" to try to help us understand. "If you do not believe I AM, you will indeed die in your sins." I AM is the name of the eternal God, YHWH. (Exodus 3:13-14) If you don't believe Him, you will die in your sins. The Eternal God speaks to us through Jesus. (Hebrews 1:2)

They tried to get Him to say it more clearly. What Jesus had said could be taken two ways. They wanted Him to say it so plainly that they could then accuse Him of blasphemy. (Isaiah 47:8-9) Jesus merely reiterated that His judgment was from God.

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.* To lift Him up is a reference to Isaiah 52:13. In that suffering servant passage, the Messiah is said to "be raised, lifted up, and highly exalted". What a description of the crucifixion of Jesus! Jesus said that when they do that, then they will know "I AM"! They will know because of the resurrection. They will know when the guards come and tell the story of angels and an exalted Jesus. They will know then, and yet they will bribe the guards to lie about what took place. (Matthew 28:12-13)

Then they will also know that Jesus does nothing on His own but speaks just what the Father has taught Him. (John 7:16) As a man, Jesus set aside His omniscience. He had to listen to the Father and get His directions. (Philippians 2:5-6) He had to rely on the Holy Spirit. He knew that man is prone to error, but that the Father is never wrong. He is always righteous and true. So Jesus would do nothing on His own. He would only do and say what the Father showed Him. Jesus is our perfect example because He perfectly listened to and obeyed the Father. This is why He is the light of the world. Jesus is explaining why He is saying these things.

Jesus can tell them they are of this world because He heard it from the Father. He is the light of the world because He does only what the Father has taught Him. He can tell them they will die in their sins if they do not believe "I AM" because He is the Father's provision for our sins. (2Corinthians 5:19)

²⁹ *The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.* The Father sent the Son into the world, but He went with Him. There is that indefinable oneness yet separateness, individuals in perfect unity, indistinguishable in attributes. Could Jesus have done anything but please the Father? Can perfection cease to be perfect? I'll leave that for the theologians to debate. I do know that Jesus chose to please the Father by always looking to Him and following His leading.

There were some amazing men in the Old Testament, some of whom it was said that they walked with God. (Genesis 5:22) But only Jesus could say, *"I always do what pleases Him."* Oh that we might have a heart to be like Jesus! For most of us

Commented [notes18]: 13 Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Ex 3:13-14 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. Heb 1:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 8 "Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.' 9 Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells. Isaiah 47:8-9 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 13 See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Isaiah 52:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, 13 telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'" Matt 28:12-13 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 16 Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. John 7:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. Phil 2:6-7 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Cor 5:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 22 And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Gen 5:22 (NIV)

we might say, "I only do what pleases me." Jesus had something to say about that all too common worldly mindset. "If you try to cling to your life you will lose it, but if you lose your life my sake," (Matthew 16:25) in other words give up that selfish desire to please yourself alone and allow your life to be about pleasing the One that gave you life, "you will find it." How would our life change if, this very day, we committed our hearts to do only what pleases the Father? That should be the life of every Christian, for Christian means Christ follower.

Commented [notes27]: 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.
Matt 16:25 (NIV)

Many today aren't so different from those religious leaders of Jesus' day. They parse His words and challenge nearly every statement. Jesus just kept on making one unequaled claim after another. "I am the bread of life. If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink. I am the light of the world. Follow me and you will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. God's only requirement is that you believe in the Son. If you don't believe 'I Am' you will die in your sins." I could go on and on, and we have many more yet to unpack in the Gospel of John.

Two weeks ago we stood in the Court of the Women as the water ceremony concluded and heard Jesus declare, *"If anyone is thirsty, let Him come to me and drink. As the Scriptures have said, 'Streams of living water will flow from within Him.'"* Now later that evening, let us stand there again. The crowds are standing in silent expectation as the priest is climbing the ladder to the top of the fourth candelabrum, the Great Light, torch in hand. Their thoughts go to the Scripture about the light and the full salvation that is to come. What does it mean? How would it appear?

Then a voice, sharp and loud declares, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* What an announcement! He is God's way of bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. He is the long awaited Great Light. What a claim! What a promise!

Are you walking in darkness? Why don't you start following Him this morning? He promised that if you did you would never again walk in darkness but would have the light of life. Why not take Him up on it right now? Step into the light! He is the voice in the bush that delivers us from bondage. He is the light in the night that guides our way. He is the light in the Temple that assures us His presence is with us. He is our salvation and is gone out into the ends of the earth. He is the Light. He is I AM.