

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Studies in John's Gospel: Jesus, the Light of the World- John 8

Introduction

In the North Transept of St. Paul's Cathedral hangs a painting by William Holman Hunt. It is entitled "*The Light of the World*" depicting Christ holding a lantern and standing outside a door. It is clear that the door has not been opened for a long time because weeds grow out from beneath it. Nonetheless, Christ is knocking on the door. There is no outside latch on the door suggesting that those inside are required to open it in order to let Him in. Although dressed in garments of glory, the golden crown Christ wears is woven with a second crown of thorns reminding us that He was accursed of God when He hung on the cross at Golgotha. There He exhausted the judgement of God against sin.

The painting symbolises the message of Christ to the church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," says the Lord. "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in and sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). Unfortunately, the appeal is to individuals in a church that has shut Christ out. It is a church that does not accept His lordship. It is a church that refuses to keep His word and, as a result, denies His name. That church can be recognised today, even in our own country. It is a church that has given up the truth of the Bible, being caught up with, and influenced by, the opinions of the world. However, it is our particular privilege today, to complete a *word-painting of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Light of the World* and to express the necessity of following Him if we are to be eternally blessed.

The verse under consideration is John 8:12 which reads, "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

In this talk, we will examine:

- The context of the chapter in which He declares this;
- The significance of "I am" when used by Jesus;
- The meaning of "the Light";
- The interpretation of "the world" in this context;
- The discipline of "following" Christ; and
- The meaning of "the light of life".

The Scriptural Context

John 8 may be divided into several sections. From verses 1-11 we find Jesus teaching in the temple when the scribes and Pharisees bring to Him a woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery. They hoped to catch Him out by getting Him to contradict the Law of Moses that demanded she should be stoned to death. Jesus' response turned the Law of Moses against them. He wrote with His finger on the ground before rising and saying, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." He then wrote on the ground again. Personally, I think He wrote their *names* in the earth because they left *in order* from the oldest to the youngest. In Jeremiah 17:13 we read, "O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters." The wages of sin is death! Their names were written in the dust of death because all of them had sinned. However, Jesus did not condone the sin of the woman. He told her to go and sin no more. He who had come in grace - not to condemn the world - but to save it - did not condemn her while here on earth. If she did not trust in Him following this event, she may well stand before Him as Judge in a future day. So it is for all who have sinned.

At this point Jesus begins a series of discourses as He introduces Himself as the Light of the World in verse 12.

- From verses 13-27, Jesus outlines the witness to the truth of His teaching. He begins with Himself and the witness of His Father. The Pharisees recognised neither. Jesus goes on to tell them that he is from above and that if they did not believe in Him they would die in their sins.
- In verse 28, He speaks of His death as a witness to Him being the "I am he", namely, God.
- From verse 30, we see that many believed on Him at this point and Jesus encouraged them to obey His word

with the truth making them free.

- A discourse concerning the Jews being Abraham's seed and free already prompts Christ to show them that those who sin are the slaves of sin - therefore, in bondage. He showed them that only the Son (i.e. Himself) could make them free from such a master (verses 33-36). This anticipated His work of redemption.
- They then indicated that Abraham was their father. Although this may have been true by procreation, Jesus denies it spiritually because they lacked Abraham's faith. He indicated that those who were true children of Abraham would have God as their Father and love Jesus because He was the One God had sent. He then states that those who denied the truth of His teaching had the devil as their father and were not of God at all (verses 44-47).
- In verses 41 and 48, the Jews show their animosity by accusing Him of being illegitimate and a demon-possessed Samaritan. Jesus reminded them that there is One who judges - God - and that He honoured Him. Jesus went on to say that those who keep His saying shall never see death.
- The last verses from 52-59 reveal that Jesus is greater than Abraham and that the patriarch had looked forward to, and seen the day of Christ with rejoicing. The Jews pointed out that Jesus was not yet fifty years old and could not have seen Abraham. The Lord Jesus then claims to be the God of the Old Testament by stating: "Before Abraham was, I am." This leads us to examine:

The Significance of "I am" when used by Jesus in the Gospel according to John.

On many occasions, Jesus uses the term "I am" in a very special way. The force of the words is seen in John 8:58 where He said to the critical Jews, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." It would seem, initially, that He was claiming to be pre-existent to Abraham; but the Jews realised that He was claiming to be eternal - God Himself. Why? When we turn to Exodus 3:14, we find God revealing Himself to Moses: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." The self-existent God revealed Himself to Israel's leader as "I AM". So we see when Jesus uses the words, "I am" in certain contexts, He is indeed claiming to be God. It was no wonder that the religious Jews took up stones to cast at him. They knew that for a man to make such a claim was worthy of death. But on that occasion, Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

There are a number of "I am's" in the Gospel according to John. In John 10:36, we read His own words: "Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?"

The clause, "I am the Son of God" emphasises, firstly, that there is more than One Person in the Godhead; and, secondly, that He is the Son of God who is none other than God Himself. Just as a man is made up of spirit, soul and body - three yet one - in a similar way - God is three, yet one, because He is the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In Colossians 1, we read that the fullness of Godhead was pleased to reside in the Son of the Father's love. In chapter 2 of the same epistle, we read that the same fullness resided in Him bodily (that is, as a man). So the Son of God never ceased to be God.

The power of the Son of God as the I AM is seen in John 18:5-6 where Jesus is approached by the band of men sent to arrest Him. He asked them who they sought. They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth". Jesus said unto them, "I am he". As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. The literal meaning of these last words is that *they recoiled and prostrated* themselves before Him in worship. Such was the power of His word. Yet, even this occasion was an action to glorify God in that it fulfilled Psalm 40:14 which is a song about the Messiah: "Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it: let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil." How remarkably many of the Psalms reveal to us the feelings of Christ.

In John 8:23-24, Jesus uses the same term to the unbelieving Jews: "And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." This statement would have struck into the hearts of the Scripture-reading Jew because we read in Isaiah 41:4: "I the LORD, the first and with the last; I am he." Again in Isaiah 43:10-11, we read: "...That ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour."

Here we have the One who is God in relation to all - and Yahweh (or Jehovah) who had a special relationship with Israel - identifying Himself as "I am he". It means "*the LORD the same*". It directs us to the epistle to the Hebrews that speaks of the superiority of the Son of God. In Hebrews 1:10-12, we find that the Son of God is addressed in the following way: "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thine hands: they shall perish but thou remainest; and they shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: *but thou art the same*, and thy years shall not fail." Jesus Christ, the

same, yesterday, today and for ever! Time forbids us to consider how Jesus uses "I am he" in other verses of John's Gospel; but they are well worth studying.

A Consideration of "the Light"

The apostle John reveals the Son of God as the Word in the first few verses of his Gospel. We know that John is identifying a Person as the Word because he uses the pronoun "Him" - "All things were made by Him". The same clause declares the Word to be the Originator of all things.

Furthermore, "Without Him was not anything made that was made" emphasises that nothing could have come into being without Him.

"In the beginning was the Word" reveals that no matter how many beginnings we go back, the Word was already in existence. He is eternal.

"The Word was with God" shows us that this Word was a distinct Person who was face to face with God.

"And the Word was God" tells us that He, though a distinct Person, was nonetheless God.

"The same was in the beginning with God" is stating that He, being God, yet a distinct Person in the Godhead, always existed as such. He is eternal in His Person.

It is then that we read: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."

The words, "In him was life" show that He is the Source of every living thing. Without this Word, life cannot be sustained.

"The life was the light of men" informs us that the "Word who became flesh" (verse 14) has made the nature of God (and His will for men) as clear as crystal. *God, who is light, is revealed through the Person of the Word.* In Genesis 1 we read that divine light appeared first to dissipate the existing darkness that shrouded the original creation. The Word of John's Gospel has life that is light. An understanding of that light dispels, not a literal darkness, but one that was spiritual and moral. Such a darkness envelops this earth because of the sin of mankind. The sinless life of Christ, highlights the sinfulness of human kind. The apostle Paul states in 2 Corinthians 4:6: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

In John 1:6-9 we read of John the Baptist's witness to Christ, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of *the* Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was *the true Light*, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." The Baptist declares the Lord Jesus to be the "true light". The light of Christ fell upon men as soon as He entered and passed through this world. If creation declares the glory of God, then the Son of God has both shown God by His works and declared God by His words. He was indeed a *light to lighten* the Gentiles, and the glory of God's people Israel as proclaimed by Simeon in Luke 2:32. He is also the fulfilment of the prophecy recorded in Isaiah 9:2 and confirmed in Matthew 4:16: "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up."

Although light was brought into the world by the Son of God, people of the time, in general, rejected it as they rejected Him. In John 3:19-21 we read, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

The Lord Jesus said, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46). What a promise! Faith in Christ will transfer you from the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love (Colossians 1:13). There you will have the light of life. Eternal life will be yours (1 John 5:13)!

So we can summarise our consideration of Christ as the light with an acrostic of what He can do. He **L**iberates, **I**nforms, **G**uides, **H**ighlights and **T**rains.

- **Liberates:** He is able to transfer you from a kingdom of darkness into His own kingdom of light.
- **Informs:** He reveals the Godhead to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and their roles in the salvation and

blessing of people.

- **Guides:** He shows the way of God to people in a world saturated by moral and spiritual darkness.
- **Highlights:** He places the lives of people under a spotlight in order to reveal sin and convict souls in order that they may repent and put their trust in Him.
- **Trains:** He disciplines believers in order that they may live lives that glorify God in this world even as His own life did. It is noteworthy that all Christians are chastened by the Father of spirits. This training proves that they are true sons of God and loved by Him. For such child-training, God may have to use a scourge (Hebrews 12:6). Parents should observe that discipline is a proof of the love they have for their children. Governments should recognise that for society to be lawful, the early disciplining of children is vital.

The Meaning of the Phrase “of the World”

The meaning of the phrase “of the world” simply refers to all the people of the world from the time of Christ's entry into the world through His birth at Bethlehem through to the present day. Christ, the *True* Light has shone upon them all. As the prophet Micah predicted: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2). The Ruler of Israel is not only a light for Israel but, as mentioned before, He is the light of the Gentiles also - the light of all the people in the world. It is these same people of whom John 3:16 speaks, “For God so loved *the world*, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

What it Means to Follow the Light of the World

As the True Light, Christ continues to shine upon men. However, His title as the Light of the World seems to be restricted, in a secondary sense, to the time when He was present on earth. In John 9:5 the following words of Jesus are recorded, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” The words indicate that when He ascended into heaven as a man, He was no longer the light of the world.

However, there were to be *lights left in the world* to represent Him. In Matthew 5:14-16 we hear Him speaking to His disciples, “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” The disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ were declared to be the light of the world. That light has shone through living believers down through the ages to the present day. It is seen through good works. That is to say, works that are done in obedience to the will of God, for His glory, and to the benefit of others.

The disciples who faithfully followed Jesus while He was upon earth did not walk in darkness. They had the light of life. So what did it mean for them “to follow the Light of the World”?

Firstly, *they answered His call in a positive and sincere way*. Their response was immediate. There was obedience. Only one of the disciples, Judas Iscariot, the traitor, followed Him for purely selfish reasons. Are we ready to obey His voice?

Secondly, *to follow Jesus was tiring*. The Lord went about continually doing good. His disciples went with Him. Are we prepared to spend and be spent in this way?

Thirdly, *Christ was not concerned about the comforts of life*. He, the Son of man, often had to take His rest out in the open. His disciples would share this hardship also.

Fourthly, *following Jesus was dangerous*. He had many enemies who, motivated by jealousy, sought to take His life. His disciples would share in this rejection and persecution. Are we prepared to suffer at the hands of men for His name's sake?

Finally, *He was constant in doing the will of His Father no matter what the cost*. The disciples found this difficult to practice at first. Shall we, by His grace, continue to do His will no matter what the cost?

The force of the *Greek word for “disciple” describes learning and endeavour*. So a disciple is prepared to be taught and put that teaching into practice. The disciples of Jesus not only learned from His teaching, but from His behaviour also. Hence, they sought to follow in His steps. The apostle Peter encourages suffering Christians with these words, “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

The Meaning of “the Light of Life”

As the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ said, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). This is “life beyond measure”. It begins here on earth when we become, through faith, the possession of Christ. In John 10:28, He said, “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” Those who trust in Him have eternal life. *This is a quality of life as well as a length of life.* In order to see eternal life, we only need look at the life of Christ because He is the *only true God and eternal life* (1 John 5:20). In 1 John 5:11 we find, “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” Finally, in 1 John 5:13 we find, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” May you do so and walk accordingly for His name's sake.

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