

"The Light of the World"
John 8:12-30
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Turn with me to John chapter 8. You will recall from our study last week that Jesus was attending the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Everything that occurred during the Feast of Tabernacles was designed to remind the Israelites of the time their forefathers spent in the wilderness. During this week they lived in little booths made out of tree limbs and branches. These booths reminded them of how they had lived in tents in the wilderness and how the LORD cared for them and provided for all their needs as they journeyed through the desert.

As we learned last week, on each day of the Feast there was a procession to the Pool of Siloam. A priest would draw water out of the pool with a golden pitcher. Then they would return to the Temple chanting and singing some of the Psalms. One of the Psalms they sang was **Psalm 114:7-8: "Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool, the hard rock into springs of water."** Their use of this Psalm shows that the ceremony was a **remembrance** of God's provision of water for the people of Israel during their sojourn in the wilderness. The rock that Moses was instructed to smite with his rod provided the water. At the high point of that ceremony, as the priest was pouring the water over the altar--symbolizing how God had given them water out of the rock, Jesus broke into the festivities and said in a loud voice, **"If a 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"** (7:37-38).

There was a second ceremony connected with this Festival. It was the ceremony called "The Illumination of the Temple." This ceremony took place each evening in one of the courts of the Temple--the Court of the Women. In the center of this court two giant candelabra were set up (two golden Menorahs--the many-branched candlesticks used by the Jews). Some accounts say these golden candelabra were as high as the highest walls of the temple. At the top of these candelabra were great bowls holding sixty-five liters of oil. There was a ladder for each branch of the Menorahs, and in the evening after the sun had set, young healthy priests would carry the oil up to the top, and light the wicks. The flames from these giant torches illuminated the whole temple and most of Jerusalem. It was a spectacular sight. The **Mishnah** describes what happened after the candelabra were lit: "Men of piety and good works used to dance before them with burning torches in their hands singing songs and praises and countless Levites played on harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets and instruments of music."

This ceremony was a celebration of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire that went before the people of Israel during their journey through the wilderness. Listen to the description of it in **Exodus 13:21-22: "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. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people."**

This pillar of cloud and fire appeared on the day when the people left Egypt. It stood between the Israelites and the pursuing armies of the Egyptians the night before they crossed the Red Sea. It kept them from being attacked. Later it guided them through the wilderness. It also spread out over them to give shade by day and light and warmth by night.

Why was this pillar of cloud important? The most obvious way it was important was that it **symbolized God's presence** with the people of Israel. All through their journey they were constantly reminded that the presence of God went with them and overshadowed them in all they did.

Second, the cloud was important because it was **the primary way God protected them**. Without it they would have perished long before they ever entered the land of Canaan--either from their human enemies like Pharaoh and his army or from the natural dangers of the desert. It provided **shade** by day and **light** and **warmth** at night.

There is a hymn that speaks of God's protection of his people on their wilderness journey:

Round each habitation hov'ring
 See the cloud and fire appear
 For a glory and a cov'ring
 Showing that the Lord is near!
 Thus, deriving from their banner
 Light by night and shade by day,
 Safe they feed upon the manna
 Which he gives them when they pray.

Third, the cloud was important because it was the primary way the LORD **guided** them while they were in the desert. When the cloud moved they were to move. When the cloud remained in one place, they remained. There is a passage in Numbers 9:17-23 that makes this clear:

Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the LORD's order and did not set out. Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the LORD's command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out. Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. At the LORD's command they encamped, and at the LORD's command they set out. They obeyed the LORD's order, in accordance with his command through Moses.

So all through their journey, they were constantly reminded that the **LORD's presence** was with them overshadowing them in all they did, and giving them light. He was there **protecting** them and **guiding** them. This ceremony at the Feast of Tabernacles was a celebration of the God's **presence**, and **protection** and **guidance** through all those years of their journey through the wilderness. The light from the pillar of cloud was the Shekinah glory of God.

Now, in the very place in the temple, where the ceremony had taken place the night before--- probably with the charred torches still in place on top of the giant candelabra, Jesus raised his voice above the crowd and proclaimed: ***"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows ME will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."***

Notice first...

I. WHAT JESUS ANNOUNCED ABOUT HIMSELF (12a)

"I am the light of the world" Jesus was saying in effect, "Do you remember the pillar of fire that came between you and the Egyptians near the Red Sea, the pillar that protected you and led you on your wanderings in the wilderness? That was **my presence** with you. I am God with you! It was I who **protected** you. It was I who **guided** you through the wilderness. I am the light of the **WORLD--not just the light for the nation of Israel, but the light of the whole world.** What a statement! Can you imagine these words coming from the lips of any mere man today! Politicians make some pretty amazing claims for themselves around election time, but no man would dare to say what Jesus said: ***"I am the light of the world."*** If Jesus Christ had been anything less than God, it would have been lunacy or blasphemy to speak like this. C.S. Lewis pointed this out in his famous quotation which I referred to a few weeks ago: ***I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to"*** (Mere Christianity, 56).

Notice secondly...

II. WHAT JESUS CLAIMS FOR HIS FOLLOWERS (12b)

"The man who follows me will NEVER walk in darkness, but will HAVE the light of life"--- not just light for one exciting night, a light that will flicker and die like these charred torches here in the Temple, but light for all the pathway of his life.

We need to take these beautiful words seriously because Jesus means them. This was not a politician's promise, like those we are hearing so frequently as election day approaches. He intends to fulfill these words in any human life. He was saying that in this dark world, He is the light that has come from God and gives life to men. He is the answer. We may be stumbling along, wondering what life is all about. We may be confused. We may wonder if we can even take another step. Jesus says to us, "I am the light of the world." The person who follows me---- not just knows about me, BUT the person who walks with me, obeys me and stays with me will have light in his pathway.

The Greek word for "follow" that is used here (*akolouthein*) has a number of closely related meanings.

It was often used of a **SOLDIER** following his captain. Our captain is Christ. We are his DRF-1. Have you heard that expression: DRF-1? As you know, John Rij is stationed at Scofield Army Base here in Hawaii. John was recently assigned DRF-1. DRF-1 stands for Deployment Ready Force One--an elite group of soldiers who are ready at a moment's notice 24 hours a day. To be a follower of Christ means to be his Deployment Ready Force in this world.

This Greek word for "follow" was also used of a **SLAVE** following his master wherever he went, always ready to carry out the tasks his master gave him to do. That's the kind of attitude a follower of Jesus Christ has--an attitude of total submission and readiness to do His will.

This word was also used of a **CITIZEN** obeying the laws of a city or a state. As followers of Christ, we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the law of Christ is the law that **governs** our life.

I also noticed that the word "follow" is in the present tense which means Jesus is speaking here not of some casual, part-time relationship with Christ, but a **continuous** whole-hearted devotion to Him.

In the wilderness, the Israelites kept their attention on the cloud. They watched to see when and where it would move. At night they walked in its light. No matter how dark the night, when they were under the cloud there was no confusion, no stumbling, no fear. Jesus provides the same benefits to us. When we follow him, we understand how to make our way through this dark world. We are not confused and stumbling through life in the dark like others.

Jesus not only gives us light so that we do not stumble in the dark as we walk through life, but more than that he says we will "**have (or possess)** the light of life." The light we possess because of our relationship to Him flows out of us to others. We become in a sense shafts of his light. That is why Jesus says in Matthew 5:14: "***You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.***" Paul told the Philippian Christians that in this crooked and depraved generation, "***you shine like stars in the universe***" (Phil 2:15).

The Bible suggests another wonderful thing about us: As followers of Christ, he not only **GIVES** us light so that we never walk in darkness, and then **CAUSES** his light to flow out of us to others----in Matthew 13:43 Jesus says a day is coming a day when we will participate in the final glory that awaits us. ***"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."*** We will put on the splendor of the sun! I don't understand what that all means, but it sounds awesome doesn't it! C. S. Lewis once noted that the heavens only **REFLECT** or **suggest** the glory of God, but we **SHARE** the glory of God with Christ. One day we will be more glorious than the heavens! In The Weight of Glory, Lewis says, "Nature is mortal. We shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive. Nature is only the image, the symbol, but it is a symbol Scripture invites me to use. We are summoned to pass through nature beyond her to the splendor which she fitfully reflects." I believe that. I John 3:2 says: ***"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."*** In the final chapter of Revelation, John wrote: ***"There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever" (22:5).*** We are headed for something so glorious that it is beyond imagination!

Sadly, not all who heard Jesus' claim thought it was wonderful. Some rejected his words. So we see thirdly...

III. WHAT JESUS SAYS TO THOSE WHO REJECT HIS CLAIMS (13-30)

In the verses that follow we see why every person in the world needs Jesus Christ--everyone--and what it is that holds people back from the light and allows them to sometimes spend their whole lives in darkness. There are two things that keep people from opening their hearts to Christ: **IGNORANCE**.....and **PRIDE**. Ignorance of the facts and pride that refuses to submit to those facts.

Notice in verse 14: ***"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."*** **In verse 19:** ***"You do not know me or my Father."*** That is **IGNORANCE**. Ignorance keeps millions of people in darkness. They have either never heard of Christ, or if they have heard, they have a distorted, twisted, unreal picture of him. In verse 13 the Pharisees challenged him, ***"Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."*** They hung their unbelief on a technicality. Many people do that who do not really want to believe. They have never really carefully investigated the claims of Christ, but they base their rejection of him on some technicality.

In verse 21 John turns to the second reason why men and women remain in darkness--and that is because of their **SELF-RIGHTEOUS PRIDE**. *"Once more Jesus said to them, 'I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sins. Where I go, you cannot come.' This made the Jews ask, 'Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come?'"* In response to his words, *"Where I am going you cannot come,"* they sarcastically reply, *"Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come?'"* Their words were dripping with self-righteous pride. They believed that anyone who committed suicide went to the deepest place in hell, where there was a special torment reserved for them. So their sarcastic response is, "Of course we will never go there. We could never follow him to hell." In their pride they regarded themselves as good and decent people whom God could never send to hell or shut out from heaven. But Jesus says to them in **verse 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."* In other words, if you continue in the direction you are heading you will finally end up in hell.

Is **ignorance** or **pride** keeping you from Christ this morning?

ILLUSTRATION: When our son David about seven years old we lived in Kaneohe, and had a friend named Art. Art was a very **kind** man. He took David fishing from time to time and enjoyed spending time with our family. But Art was not a believer. We were praying that the Lord would use us to lead him to Christ. One day after one of those fishing trips, he and David were walking back to the car along the side of the road, and David asked, "Art, are you a Christian?" He said, no David, I'm NOT a Christian. David said, "Well, I AM a Christian." Art asked, "What does it mean to you, David, to be a Christian?" David said, "Well one thing it means to me is that as we walk along this road, if a car came along right now and accidentally ran over us and killed us I would go to heaven but you wouldn't." The Lord used those words from the lips of a child that day to convict Art of his need of Christ. Soon he did trust the Lord Jesus as his personal Savior, and today Art is an active, growing believer.

The ultimate necessity of life is to have Jesus Christ. Everyone needs him. There is no concern, no need, no issue that is more urgent than your relationship with Christ--because without him you will walk ultimately into eternal darkness.

CONCLUSION

Jesus says, "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Walking in the light means following Christ, like the children of Israel kept their eyes on the cloud and followed it. **Numbers 9** says: *"Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted...the Israelites set out; whenever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. At the Lord's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped..."*

One of the most indispensable ways of living the Christian life is to learn the principle of submission to Christ. It seems as though we need to keep learning this principle again and again. Kent Hughes has written that at times we find the joy and peace and power leaving our lives, and confusion and weariness starts to settle in. At times like that the only way we can find relief is to submit again to Christ. When we lay everything at his feet in total submission to him, we find rest and peace and power and joy coming back again.

If you feel confused and disoriented as a believer this morning, if the joy seems to have gone out of your life, there is a good chance you again need to submit everything to Christ. Get yourself back under the cloud. Don't run ahead of it or stand behind it. Stay underneath it. That requires faith and submission to God. The Psalmist David said in Psalm 42:1: ***"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, o God."***

Perhaps you have never experienced the light of life and you are wondering how to get it. **John 1:12** says, "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." Submit yourself to that truth. Acknowledge that you are a sinner. Admit that within you there is no good thing that can commend you to God. Submit your self to the blood of Jesus Christ which cleanses us from all sin. As you do that you will begin to walk in the light. ***"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."***

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