

## John 8:12-20 – “I Am the Light of the World”

(Pew Bible Page: 894)

**Intro:** John’s gospel repeatedly returns to the “*I Am*” theme in identifying Jesus as God come down to us in human flesh. Last week we looked at the first of the seven “*I Am*” statements in John, “*I Am the Bread of Life*.” Tonight, we’ll move on to the second of these great statements: “*I Am the Light of the World*.” Questions arise as we hear this statement of Jesus. In what sense is Jesus, “*The Light of the World*”? How can we be sure that Jesus is “*The Light of the World*”? What is the reason that some do not receive Jesus as “*The Light of the World*”? It is no exaggeration to say that the fate of a man’s soul rests on receiving Jesus’ claim to be “*The Light*”, but some refuse to hear Him. Tonight’s passage will deal not only with Jesus’ claim but with the Pharisee’s refusal of Jesus’ testimony about Himself in this matter. They sought in every way to overturn Jesus’ testimony of Himself. How they tried! In chapter 7 we find the leaders plotting to arrest Him, but nothing came of it. In the first eleven verses of chapter eight we find them trying to impeach His reputation with the people, but again they failed. Tonight, we’ll witness them attempt to deny His testimony on a technicality, but once again without effect because as verse 20 tells us, “*His hour had not yet come.*”

Billboard: <sup>1</sup>	(vv.12;20)	One Light
	(vv.13-18)	Two Witnesses
	(v.19)	Total Darkness

**Proposition:** Jesus is the Light of the World. Whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness but will have the Light of Life.

(vv.12;20) One Light – We begin our study with Jesus’ “*I Am*” claim: **John 8:12 - 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.”* As noted last week, when Jesus used the words, “*I Am*” as part of His statements of identity, He was using a phrase that would immediately catch the attention of every listener, for “*I Am*” was the covenant name for Himself that God had given the Jewish people through Moses in the Wilderness. We need not rehash that point, but simply note that here again, Jesus coupled that name for deity with a characteristic of Himself: “*I am the light of the world.*” From the very first pages of Scripture and throughout the book of John, “light” has been a symbol for the knowledge of God, and “darkness” likewise is a symbol for ignorance of God. Moral righteousness is inseparably attached to the symbol of “light” because there is no darkness in God at all as John tells us in 1 John 1:5. In the same way, “darkness” inevitably is connected to unrighteousness, as Jesus Himself told us in John 3:19. So, the very first thing that Jesus is telling us is that He is the knowledge of God come down to us, bringing goodness and righteousness down to the dark and dirty world of humanity. Jesus is God’s revelation of Himself to fallen man, and He is a revelation that can be received with startling results: “*Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” One receives the Light by following Jesus, which means that a man commits himself to Jesus as God, listens to Jesus as Savior, and obeys Jesus as Master. A follower renounces the right to call his own shots, placing himself completely under the authority of Jesus in the same way that a slave submits to his master; an employee to his boss; a soldier to his commander; a child to a beloved his parent. Jesus went on to say that whoever follows Him “*will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” Jesus’ choice of the time and place to make this statement is revealing, because this revelation took place either during or shortly after the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, and we are told in **verse 20** that “*These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple.*” It’s a comment that seems out of place until we realize that during the Feast of Tabernacles, the treasury (a portion of the Women’s Court) was the location of two colossal lampstands,

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<sup>1</sup> James M. Boice supplied the thread of understanding for this study.

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hung with numerous lamps whose light could be seen from every quarter of Jerusalem. In keeping with the meaning of the Feast, which commemorated Israel’s Wilderness journey, those lampstands represented the cloud and the pillar of fire that accompanied the people on their journey. It’s instructive to ask the meaning of the sign and then apply it to Jesus. The Cloud and the Pillar of Fire represented three things. First, they represented the PRESENCE of God with His people (Exodus 13:21-22). God spoke to His people from the Cloud, and in one passage Moses even spoke to the Cloud as if speaking to God (Numbers 10:35-36). So, Jesus is the living presence of God come down to man. The Cloud and the Pillar also provided PROTECTION for the people in the Wilderness. We are told that the Cloud and the Pillar interposed between the Israel and the pursuing Egyptians at the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 14:19-20). Further, the Cloud overshadowed the people as they journeyed, preserving their lives from the heat of the Wilderness which often reaches 120+ degrees in the daytime. In like manner, the Pillar of Fire protected the people from the cold night temperatures of the Sinai Desert. So, Jesus is God’s protection come down on offer to man. Finally, the Cloud and Pillar gave GUIDANCE to the people. When the Cloud lifted, the people broke camp and set out. When the Cloud descended, Israel stopped their journey and didn’t resume until the Cloud once again rose (Numbers 9:17-23). So, Jesus is God’s guidance for all who follow Jesus. One last thing to note is that Jesus is “*the light of life.*” This means that Jesus is the knowledge of God that brings life to the world, as Jesus said in **John 17:3 - 3** *And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.* Jesus is the true knowledge of God that has come down offering eternal life to whomever will follow Him. These are the claims that Jesus made for Himself when He said, “*I am the light of the world.*”

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Jesus is the One Light that brings Life to the World.

[ILLUSTRATION] The world tonight is shrouded in darkness. As we speak darkness is descending on our community. The sun is sinking in the West and in just a few moments the light of the sun will once again be obscured by the bulk of our turning globe. There is a snippet of an old song by Larry Norman that I can’t get out of my mind as I think about this. After detailing the upsets and evils of “this present darkness,” the song concludes with this line: “*Don’t ask me for answers, I’ve only got one. That a man leaves the darkness, when he follows the Son.*”

[APPLICATION] Jesus’ claim is that He is the Light that brings Life to whoever follows Him. This light is available to anyone, anywhere, who is willing to receive it. That is why Jesus calls Himself “*the light of the WORLD.*” But though the Light has come into the world, not everyone is willing to receive the Light’s testimony of Himself, as we see in the next paragraph of the text.

(vv.13-18) Two Witnesses – Jesus’ enemies, the Pharisees, rejected His testimony about Himself by throwing up against Him a legal technicality: **John 8:13 - 13** *So the Pharisees said to him, “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.”* Their argument was that Jesus’ testimony about Himself would not have been accepted in a Jewish court of law because He was testifying on His own behalf. Jewish courts did not allow anyone to serve as his own character witness. James Boice helps us understand: “*No one could testify concerning himself. The rulers now applied this to Jesus, their point being that whether or not his claim was true, at least in so far as evidence was concerned it was invalid*” because Jesus was serving as His own character witness, which was not allowed. They threw out His testimony in other words because of a legal technicality. Jesus’ reply was that that technicality did not apply in His case, because He brought to earth a SUPERIOR TESTIMONY to human witness: **John 8:14 - 14** *Jesus answered, “Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going.* Jesus’ argument is that His testimony was true because of His origin

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and His destiny: Jesus knew that He had come from the Father, and that He was returning to the Father (John 13:3). Jesus was no ordinary human witness. He was “The Great ‘I Am’” – God in human flesh. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Jesus, therefore, presented a testimony of the truth which by nature was unimpeachable. The Pharisees could not receive this witness because their vision was completely horizontal rather than vertical: **John 8:14–15 – 14** *Jesus answered... but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. - 15* *You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one.* Their judgment was far from impartial because they had no understanding of Who Jesus was or where He had come from. Jesus said, “Your judgment is completely earthly, as contrasted with mine, which is heavenly in nature.” **John 8:16 - 16** *Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me.* Only God can serve as His own character witness, and since Jesus and His Father are one (John 10:30) Jesus’ witness is inevitably trustworthy. Jesus now responded to their technicality with a technicality of His own: **John 8:17–18 - 17** *In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. 18* *I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.”* Jewish law required that any matter brought before a court had to be substantiated by at least two witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6). Jesus presented His two witnesses: Himself and the Father.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Jesus and the Father are two unimpeachable witnesses that Jesus is the Light of the World.

[ILLUSTRATION] Remember Perry Mason, the TV lawyer who always seemed to have a hopeless case to defend until at the last moment he produced a surprise witness whose testimony couldn’t be refuted? This is the “Perry Mason Moment.” Jesus produced two irrefutable witnesses to the fact that Jesus is the Light of the World.

[APPLICATION] God is the only one who can serve as his only character witness. The Scripture’s claim about Jesus is clear. God has spoken. The only real question is, are you willing to receive the Light, or will you be a Pharisee and walk away?

(v.19) Total Darkness – The Pharisees responded by mocking Jesus: **John 8:19 -19** *They said to him therefore, “Where is your Father?”* When men have no answer for an argument, they respond by mocking it and the one who made it. The Pharisees looked around in derision and spat out with some venom the question, “Where is your Father.” They were saying, “We don’t see any ‘Father’ here!” Some think they were saying, “Do you even have a father?” *Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”* Boice notes, “Their scornful rejection of Jesus revealed them as men who were in complete spiritual darkness, knowing neither the Father nor the Son.”<sup>2</sup> Romans 1 tells us the fate of such men in the devastating phrase, “God gave them over...” **Romans 1:24 - 24** *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.* When men refuse the Light, God gives them over to a heart of impurity. **Romans 1:26 - 26** *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.* When men refuse the Light, God gives them over to shameful behaviors. **Romans 1:28 - 28** *Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.* When men refuse the Light, God gives them over to depraved minds.

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<sup>2</sup> James M. Boice

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[DOCTRINAL POINT] When men reject The Light of the World, they condemn themselves and remain in total darkness.

[ILLUSTRATION] When men have no answer for an argument made against them, they mock the one who confronts them with their ignorance.

[APPLICATION] Beware that you do not mock the One who confronts you with the Light of the World. Let us make three applications to tonight’s lesson. I am indebted to James M. Boice for these three points.

First, don’t trust yourself; you are not impartial. Like the Pharisees in tonight’s account, all of us by nature are working with a merely horizontal perspective of reality. Left to ourselves we will always find a way to “see through” God’s revelation of Himself in Jesus. It is a dangerous trap set by the enemy of our soul. His accomplice is the kingdom of darkness around us. His “inside agent” is our old nature. It is a perilous thing to trust our own judgment rather than receiving the Light.

Second, trust Jesus implicitly because of Who He is. Jesus is the great “*I Am*” who is “*The Light of the World*.” Jesus is the Father’s only begotten Son who has come down from heaven to reveal God to the world. Not everyone rejoices in this Light. Not everyone values it. Not everyone receives it. But Jesus assures us that “*Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” Trust the Light.

Finally, follow Jesus as Savior and Lord. To *follow* Jesus is to go beyond a mere intellectual assent to the doctrines of the Bible. It is a volitional, irrevocable commitment to Jesus Himself. It is to take Him as Savior, Friend, Lord, and God. It is to obey His command to love God with all one’s heart and love one’s neighbor as yourself. Perhaps Christianity seems complicated and confusing. Many ask, “What do I have to do?” “What must I give up?” “How do I find the way?” Jesus answers, “*I am the way.*” Follow Him without reservation all the way into the Light of Life.

**Conclusion:** Let’s pray.