

Message #31

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John

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JESUS, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

JOHN 8:12-20

INTRO

The twelve boys and their soccer coach who were trapped in a cave in Thailand for three weeks were released from the hospital a few days ago. It was a great, feel-good story about a complicated rescue involving 2000 soldiers, 200 divers and personnel from 100 different government agencies. Many of the rescuers did not think that all of the team members would make it out alive. One of the kids is part of a child sponsorship program with Compassion International. I will have more information about his interesting story in our next church newsletter.

One of the major obstacles that the rescuers and the team members had to overcome was darkness. The soccer kids entered the cave with six flashlights. But when rescuers made contact nine days later, most of the lights had run out of battery power. So for much of the time, they were living in complete darkness. During the two hour rescue that each person endured, there was also considerable darkness. In the water part of that exit, the divers said that they often could not see their hands in front of them.

Hector Tobar wrote a book about the rescue of the Chilean miners that happened several years ago. He told this to a New Zealand reporter who was covering the Thailand story: **"It's the darkness that makes it so unbearably terrifying, especially when there is the possibility that the dark space will become your tomb. One miner told me that's where the madness is in the dark. It drove him to the brink while he was trapped underground."** (Stuff, NZ, 7/14/2018)

There are various kinds of darkness in our world. There is the physical darkness of a cave, of the night, of physical blindness. There is also darkness that comes from confusing situations, from ignorance, from moral uncertainty and from evil. It is the latter kind of darkness that the Son of God came to dispel. It was in many ways a dark world in which He entered. He was rejected by the leaders of His own people when He declared Himself to be the light of the world. We are going to look at that declaration this morning and see what significance it has for us today.

The Apostle John wrote this biography of the life of Jesus with the purpose of convincing his readers that Jesus was, and is, the Messiah and the Son of God. In the last few chapters, we have seen that Jesus made a connection with Moses and the provision of God for the Hebrew people in their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. In #6 Jesus miraculously provided bread for 5000 men plus their families in the Galilean wilderness. The recipients of this provision recognized the parallel with the provision of manna in the wilderness centuries earlier.

In #7 we saw two weeks ago that a key event in the Feast of Tabernacles was the water ceremony, which reminded the Jews of God's provision of water in the wilderness for their ancestors. At the beginning of those wanderings God commanded Moses to strike a rock, and water came forth in abundance. Soon Jesus was to be struck down, and living water would come forth from Him. Now in #8 we encounter a second key feature of the Feast of Tabernacles, which involves light. This will be the background for Jesus' dramatic declaration that He is the light of the world.

I.

So we are going to begin by looking at the end of our passage to learn about THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE DECLARATION. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE DECLARATION) Verse 20 gives us some information about that. It is found on p. 894 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs. It reads, **"These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come."**

Last week we looked at the story recorded earlier in this chapter about the woman caught in adultery. I pointed out that the story is omitted from the earliest copies of John's Gospel and that there are good reasons for thinking that it does not fit chronologically at this point in John's biography of Jesus. Verse 12, at the start of our passage, begins with a statement about Jesus speaking to them again. Verse 20 now says that Jesus is still speaking in the temple. So I take it that the incident in our passage happens soon after the incident described in vv. 37-52 of #7. It was the last day, the great day, of the Feast of Tabernacles when Jesus declared Himself to be the source of living water. I understand that to be day seven of the feast, which was the climax of the celebration. On day eight the people went home.

Jesus' declaration that He was the source of living water and, in effect, the fulfillment of this water ceremony produced a divided reaction. Some were mildly positive, some were mildly negative. The religious leaders wanted to arrest Him. Probably later in this same day, Jesus makes another declaration.

The setting for this second declaration is said to be the treasury. (TEMPLE 2) The focus for observance of the feasts of Israel was the temple in Jerusalem. Herod the Great several decades earlier had undertaken a massive construction project to expand the temple compound. (TEMPLE 3) The Court of the Women was this inner courtyard, located inside these walls of the temple proper. All Jews, including women, were allowed into this area. Along the walls of this courtyard were located thirteen different offering receptacles, called trumpets. (OFFERING CHEST)

These trumpets apparently had openings shaped like trumpets. Each of them was labeled with the kind of offering that was to be deposited there. The offerings to be given included such things as the annual half shekel temple tax, offering for wood for the altar of burnt offering, offering for incense, offering for maintenance and replacement of temple vessels and offerings for various kinds of sacrifices.

(TEMPLE 4) So Jesus was teaching somewhere in this courtyard. Because of the presence of these offering chests in this courtyard, it was also referred to as the treasury. The events of our story take place here, probably on the same day as Jesus' declaration to be the source of living water.

II.

So we come to THE DECLARATION FROM JESUS in v. 12. (II. THE DECLARATION FROM JESUS) According to v. 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.'"** I have stressed the fact that the Apostle John records seven sign miracles in his Gospel. He also records seven "I am" statements that Jesus makes. The first one was "I am the bread of life." This is the second one.

Jesus' declaration here has tremendous prophetic significance. Even rabbis in the first century associated the coming of the Messiah with light. They could not help but recognize an association that the Old Testament makes between light and the coming Messiah. From the very beginning of this Gospel, John associated Jesus with light. (JOHN 1:4-5) In #1 vv. 4 & 5 he declared of Jesus, **"In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."**

The association of light with the coming Messiah is especially evident in the Old Testament book of Isaiah. (ISAIAH 9:1) Beginning in #9 v. 1 the prophet declares **"...in the latter time he [God] has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. (ISAIAH 9:2) The**

people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.” In #7 the Pharisees objected to the idea that the Messiah, or even a prophet, could come from Galilee. Here there is indication that a great light is going to appear in Galilee.

In Isaiah #42 we have these two verses (ISAIAH 42:1): First, in #42 v. 1: **“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.”** God speaks of a special servant who will have a unique presence of the Holy Spirit. Then in v. 6 (ISAIAH 42:6) God says of this servant, **“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind.”** This servant is not just for Israel, He is for the nations, for the Gentiles.

Then also in Isaiah #49 v. 6 (ISAIAH 49:6) the prophet quotes God as saying, **“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”**

Jesus’ claim to be the light of the world has a significant connection with the imagery involved in the Feast of Tabernacles. The stress on water pointed toward God’s provision of life in the wilderness. One passage from the Talmud (TRACTATE SUKKAH 1) says this: **“He who has not witnessed the rejoicings of the water-drawing has, throughout the whole of his life, witnessed no real rejoicing.”**

This was followed by a reference to another central feature of the feast which involved light. (TRACTATE SUKKAH 2) These ancient Jewish writings tell us, **“...they descended into the women’s court, where a great transformation was made. Golden candelabra were placed there, with four golden basins at the top of each; and four ladders were put to each candelabrum, on which stood four lads... Holding jars of oil containing 120 jugs, with which they replenished each basin.”**

These four candelabra were huge. (TEMPLE 5) They towered above the walls of the Court of the Women, where Jesus was speaking. They were lit, probably each night of the feast. (TEMPLE 6) They reportedly lit up the whole city of Jerusalem. Religious pilgrims were said to dance in their light in the temple until late in the night. On the last night of the feast, the candelabra were supposedly not lit. Perhaps it was later in the day, close to the time when the lights were previously lit each day of the feast, when Jesus declared that He was the light of the world. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The symbolism of the light and fire of the feast had another connection with Moses and the wandering of the ancestors of these people in the wilderness. In #6 we saw that Jesus' miracle of the multiplication of the loaves by the Sea of Galilee had a parallel with the provision of manna in the wilderness for the ancient Israelites. In #7 Jesus' proclamation that He was the source of living water pointed to the miraculous provision of water in the wilderness during the time of Moses. Now in #8 the declaration of Jesus that He is the light of the world had a connection with the provision of light for the children of wilderness during their wandering in the wilderness.

In Exodus #13 v. 21 we are told about how the Lord guided the children of Israel in their wilderness wanderings. (EXODUS 13:21) The text tells us, **"And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night."** So not only did this shining manifestation of God provide guidance to the Hebrews. He also shaded them from the heat in the daytime. He provided them warmth at night. Furthermore, this manifestation of light was a constant assurance of His presence with them.

Exactly who, or what, was this pillar of cloud and pillar of fire? In #14 v. 19 (EXODUS 14:19) we are told, **"Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them..."** This was a manifestation of the angel of God. Those of you who are students of the Old Testament remember that the angel of the Lord is generally recognized as the Son of God. This was the preincarnate Christ. Now at the Feast of Tabernacles He was standing before them in human form. He is the promised light for the Gentiles. He is the promised Messiah for Israel. As Israel was called upon to follow the pillar of fire in the wilderness, now Jesus is calling upon His people to follow Him. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Jesus is making an extraordinary claim. He is making an arrogant claim. It is a claim that is contributing to the animosity of the religious leaders. Jesus cannot be simply a great teacher. Great teachers do not make such preposterous claims. This Jesus is either nuts, or He is God. If He is God, then people need to follow Him. We need to follow Him.

III.

In the following verses the Pharisees express two objections. In vv. 13-18 we find THE FIRST OBJECTION ANSWERED. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE FIRST OBJECTION ANSWERED) Jesus has two responses to their first objection. In vv. 13-16 we have described THE NATURE OF JESUS' WITNESS. According to v. 13, **"So the Pharisees said to him, 'You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.'"**

The Pharisees were the legalists and the traditionalists. They were the dominant theological group among the rabbis, who composed a large part of the Sanhedrin, the high council of Judaism based in Jerusalem. In their objection they are not directly addressing Jesus' claim. They are dealing with a procedural technicality. Perhaps they are referring to Jesus' own statement from an earlier visit to Jerusalem. In #5 v. 31 He said, **"If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true."**

The background for this was an Old Testament requirement that in legal situations, especially criminal matters, two or three witnesses were required to verify testimony. But Jesus has already provided considerable testimony. He has provided miracles to prove His claim to be the Messiah. He has given remarkable teaching. He has met the Old Testament requirements for the Messiah. John the Baptist has fulfilled the Biblical requirement of the prophesied forerunner. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Look, then, at Jesus' response in v. 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, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going.'"** Ultimate truth is not dependent upon legal witnesses. Jesus is unique. He is the author of the Old Testament law. He has supernatural knowledge. He knows the future as well as the past. These critics do not even understand the past, let alone the future. They think that they understand the background of Jesus. But they have not done a thorough background check. They only know about His Galilee history. They don't know about His birth in Bethlehem and the miraculous circumstances which that involved. Jesus is the only one who fully knows the story about Himself.

In v. 15 He says, **"You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one."** The Pharisees make superficial, earthly judgments. They are excluding supernatural possibilities. They are like skeptics today who begin with antinatural presuppositions. They assume that there can be no miracles, no divine interventions in our world. Everything must be explained apart from the supernatural.

Jesus is not in the temple at the feast to judge anyone. He is not there to condemn people, like the Pharisees are doing. He is there to make a positive pronouncement. Earlier He made clear that it was not His purpose in His coming to earth to bring a condemning judgment. (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 3:17) Back in #3 v. 17 He told Nicodemus, **"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."**

In v. 16 in our passage He adds, **"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."** (PROJECTOR OFF) Jesus does not mean that He makes no judgment. His purpose in His first coming was to save, not to condemn. But His presence and mission

guarantee division. By rejecting Jesus, people put themselves in a position that they will be subject to judgment.

Ultimately Jesus will judge. For we were told (JOHN 5:27) in #5 v. 27, **“And he [God the Father] has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.”** Ultimately Jesus will act as Judge. Judgment will characterize His future return to earth. Jesus also has the full backing of His Heavenly Father. This leads to His second answer and a direct response to the technical objection of the Pharisees.

B.

In vv. 17 & 18 we are told about THE DOUBLE WITNESS TO JESUS. (III. A. B. THE DOUBLE WITNESS...) Jesus says in vv. 17 & 18, **“In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.”**

Jesus uses the term “your law.” He does that to describe the Law to which the Pharisees appeal. That law requires that there be two or more witnesses in certain legal situations. Jesus is not denying that He is accountable to the Old Testament law. As the perfect Jewish man, He is obligated to submit to it. But He also stands over it. He is in the process of fulfilling its requirements and symbolism and prophecies concerning Himself.

The specific part of the law to which the Pharisees are appealing is Deuteronomy #19 v. 15. (DEUTERONOMY 19:15) Moses there declares, **“A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.”** There is no crime involved in this situation. But Jesus says that if you want two witnesses, then you have God the Father and God the Son.

No human is qualified to speak of some of the things about which Jesus is speaking. No other being is a witness of many of these divine things. Truth comes only through the revelation of God’s Word and the incarnation of the Son of God. Jesus is living by that Old Testament Word, and He is revealing Himself and His heavenly Father to this earthly audience.

IV.

In vv. 19 & 20 of our passage we find THE SECOND OBJECTION ANSWERED. (IV. THE SECOND OBJECTION ANSWERED) According to the first part of v. 19, **“They said to him therefore, ‘Where is your Father?’”**

Jesus claims that His father backs up His testimony. The critics call for the father to be produced. The Pharisees are speaking on a physical level. They refuse to accept the possibility that Jesus is talking about God as His Father. They probably know that Joseph had died earlier. Back in #6 the religious leaders in Galilee expressed knowledge about the family of Jesus. It is likely that the Pharisees have heard rumors that Joseph was not the actual father of Jesus, or that Jesus was born out of wedlock. They suspect that Jesus is an illegitimate son. If you look ahead to v. 41, you will notice that in the middle of the verse, the Apostle John writes, **“They [the Pharisees] said to him [Jesus], ‘We were not born of sexual immorality.’”** The implication is that Jesus was.

Jesus, however, replies to the Pharisees by talking about His Heavenly Father. He says in the middle of v. 19, **“You know neither me nor my father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”** The Pharisees are ignorant about Jesus on two levels. They think that they know about Jesus’ paternal lineage, or the lack thereof. They think that He was born in Nazareth and conceived outside of the bonds of marriage. In reality He was born in Bethlehem and conceived by the Holy Spirit. They have not done a proper background check to learn about the miraculous circumstances of His birth.

On another level, the Pharisees don’t recognize the spiritual origins of Jesus. They do not know that He is the Son of God. They are spiritually blind. They refuse to recognize that Jesus has fulfilled the Biblical requirements for the Messiah. Some of His miracles they cannot deny. But they accuse Jesus of getting His power from the Devil. Jesus is also fulfilling the symbolism pictured in the Feast of Tabernacles. But they remain unenlightened. The Son of God is shining before them. But they are blinded by their own belief and stubbornness.

The reality is that the critics do not know God. They are religious people who have devoted themselves to the study and application of the Old Testament. They think that they are worshipping the true God in the temple. But, in reality, they are worshipping a god of their own creation. They have made a god in their own likeness.

That is always a danger for religious people. It is a problem with the cults. But it can also be a problem with people who call themselves Christians. We need to make sure that we have trusted in the true God, who sent His Son Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for the sins of the world and provides eternal salvation only on the basis of faith in Him.

Our story concludes in v. 20: **“These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.”** According to #7, there was an arrest warrant issued for Jesus by the Sanhedrin. Three attempts were made at this feast to seize Jesus. Yet somehow Jesus is not apprehended. The Apostle John recognizes that it is because His hour had not yet come. It is the sovereign God who is controlling the timetable of events.

So the point of the passage is that Jesus is the light of the world. If we want to avoid moral confusion, evil and spiritual ignorance, we should draw close to Jesus. We should accept His invitation to follow Him. As we do that, we will reflect His light.

After Moses met with the Lord on Mt. Sinai and received the Ten Commandments, we are told that the skin of his face shone because he had met with God. Often Moses would go into the tabernacle of God and talk to God. We are told that when he came out, a similar thing happened. (EXODUS 34:35) According to Exodus #34 v. 35, **“...the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.”**

In the Sermon on the Mount, earlier in His ministry (MATTHEW 5:16), Jesus told His followers, **“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”** We who follow Jesus have a reflected light. Our light comes from drawing close to Jesus and following Him.

Adoniram Judson was a pioneering missionary who was responsible for bringing the gospel to Burma. Henry Clay Trumbull was a pastor, author, editor and leader in the Sunday School movement in the US in the 1800s. A biographer of Trumbull describes the influence that the Baptist missionary had upon Trumbull: **“Many years ago when the great missionary Adoniram Judson was home on furlough, he passed through the city of Stonington, Connecticut. A young boy playing about the wharves at the time of Judson’s arrival was struck by the man’s appearance. Never before had he seen such a light on any human face. He ran up the street to a minister to ask if he knew who the stranger was. The minister hurried back with him, but became so absorbed in conversation with Judson that he forgot all about the impatient youngster standing near him. Many years afterward that boy--- who could never get away from the influence of that wonderful face--- became the famous preacher Henry Clay Trumbull. In a book of memoirs he penned a chapter entitled: “What a Boy Saw in the Face of Adoniram Judson.” That lighted countenance had changed his life. Even as flowers thrive when they bend to the light, so shining, radiant faces come to those who constantly turn toward Christ!”** (*The Life*

Story of Henry Clay Trumbull, Philip E. Howard) May we who follow Jesus draw close to Him so that we reflect His light to others.