

# **The Light of the World**

## **(John 8:12-30)**

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

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### **I. Overview of this Section of the Gospel of John**

- a. In this next section, Jesus presents His message within the framework of three contrasts:
  - i. Light versus darkness
  - ii. Truth versus lies
  - iii. Slavery versus freedom
- b. In this lesson we will look at the first of the three pairs of spiritual opposites: light versus darkness.

### **II. Jesus, the Light of the World (Read John 8:12-30)**

- a. This passage starts with a very famous statement of Jesus, who says, "I am the light of the world." (More on that later in this lesson.)
- b. Jesus is challenged by the Pharisees that He is serving as a witness concerning Himself; He needs another witness to testify on His behalf. Jesus points to "My Father, who sent Me."
  - i. The Pharisees then ask Jesus where His father is.
  - ii. Jesus says that they don't know Him, nor do they know His Father; if they knew Him, they would know His Father also.
- c. Jesus says in **John 8:15** "I judge no one, but if I do judge..."
  - i. As we have discussed before, the first time Jesus came was to offer salvation; the second time He comes it will be to judge the living and the dead.
  - ii. As Peter said when he preached the gospel to the household of Cornelius, "And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead." (**Acts 10:42**, NKJV)
  - iii. Paul reminded Timothy, "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom..." (**2 Timothy 4:1**, NKJV)

- d. Jesus says mysteriously, in **John 8:21**, that He is going somewhere they will not be able to follow Him.
  - i. Some of the Jews assume He is referring to death (Hades), and wonder if He is planning to kill Himself!
- e. Jesus says to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things." (**John 8:28**, NKJV)
  - i. This expression "lifting up", as you probably surmise, is referring to others lifting Him up on the cross, to be crucified.
    - 1. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up..." (**John 3:14**, NKJV)
      - a. As we discussed in an earlier lesson, Jesus is pointing back to the story in **Numbers 21:4-9**. In it, Israelites were dying from poisonous snakebites, and had to look to this bronze serpent raised up on a pole. This sign foreshadowed Christ being lifted up on the cross; only those looking to Him on the cross will be saved from the deadly bite of the serpent (Satan).
    - 2. "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die." (**John 12:32-33**, NKJV)
    - 3. Note that the same Greek word translated "lifted up" in these New Testament passages opens the famous prophecy of **Isaiah 52:13-53:12** in the LXX regarding the Suffering Servant. The prophecy begins, "Behold, my Servant shall have wisdom and shall be lifted up (sometimes translated figuratively as "will be exalted." That prophecy then goes on to describe the suffering of an innocent person who would be rejected and killed for the sins of many others.
- f. **Question:** Why would He say He was the light of the world?
  - i. *Only one* light? Why not "*a*" light of (or a light to) the world?
  - ii. Was there some prophecy about a specific light coming (similar to the prophecy about the *one* great Prophet who would come)?
  - iii. Passages from Isaiah come to mind:
    - 1. "Do this first and do it quickly: O country of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, and the rest dwelling along the

seacoast and parts of Judea, and the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, a people who walk in darkness, behold a great light; and you who dwell in the country of the shadow of death, upon you a light will shine." (**Isaiah 9:1**, LXX, OSB)

- a. This passage from **Isaiah 9** is quoted in **Matthew 4:13-16** and applied to Jesus, when Jesus first came to Capernaum, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali.
2. "Shine, shine, O Jerusalem, for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. Behold, darkness and gloom shall cover the earth upon the nations, but the Lord will shine on you; and his glory shall be seen upon you. Kings shall come to your light, and the Gentiles to your brightness." (**Isaiah 60:1-3**, LXX, OSB)
3. "The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor shall the rising of the moon shine on you at night, but the Lord shall be your everlasting light, and God your glory. For your sun shall no longer set, nor shall your moon be eclipsed, for the Lord shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be fulfilled." (**Isaiah 60:19-20**, LXX, OSB)
  - a. Based on these prophecies in Isaiah about a specific light coming and referred to as "the Lord" and "everlasting light", it seems to me that when Jesus said He was the light of the world, He was saying that He fulfilled these prophecies of Isaiah, made about 700 years before His birth in Bethlehem.
4. In a discussion at the end of Malachi about the Day of the Lord that will come, it says, "But to you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings..." (**Malachi 4:2**, NKJV; designated **Malachi 3:20** in the LXX, OSB)
- g. **Question:** In what ways is Jesus similar to light? Why do the Scriptures speak of Him as bringing everlasting light?
  - i. Recall what we learned back in **John chapter 1** regarding the light. One of the first things it says about Jesus is that He came to bring light.
    1. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which

gives light to every man coming into the world.” (John 1:4–9, NKJV)

- a. Here, we see light is associated with *spiritual life*.
- ii. Recall what Jesus said in **John chapter 3** regarding light:
  1. “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” **(John 3:19–21, NKJV)**
    - a. Light exposes what is hidden, in darkness. It exposes sin. Many hate the light who do not want to repent. A few who want the truth will come into the light.
    - b. Example of Alison using floodlights in the kitchen to discourage the “thousand-legger” insects (centipedes or millipedes).
      - i. When the light gets shined on these creatures, they run for the darkness to hide. There is a parallel in the spiritual world: when God’s light shines, many who are doing evil will run for the darkness. They do not want to come into the light, because their evil deeds will be revealed. They do not want to confess and repent of their sinful way of life.
      - ii. I have learned over the years that evangelism is simply shining God’s light, His Word, on people’s lives. Evangelism is simply “turning God’s light on,” share the Word of God with people. Either they will be drawn to the light of the truth, or they will flee. The light can be brought to bear by sharing a verse of Scripture verbally, or by opening the Bible showing someone a passage.
    - c. So many people I know have stopped studying the Bible (or refused to start) because they don’t want to repent of something in their life.
      - i. “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the

light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4, NKJV)

- h. Jesus in **John 8:12** puts people into two groups:
  - i. Those who want to follow Him (not just believe in him). They will not continue to walk in darkness but will have the light of life. *VERSUS*
  - ii. Those who will not follow Him, who will remain walking in darkness.
  - iii. Note that you will only appreciate the importance of light when you recognize the darkness.
    - 1. Recently, during a local power failure, all the lights went out in our home. In the following days, after power was restored, we purchased candles and battery-powered lanterns. Only after the power outage, when we saw what it was like to stumble around in the darkness, did we appreciate how much we needed the light!
- i. **Question:** What is the significance of the concept of “darkness” in the Scriptures?
  - i. Read about the ninth plague, the plague of darkness, in **Exodus 10:21-23** (This is perhaps my favorite plague of the ten.)
    - 1. It was a thick darkness, one that could be felt!
    - 2. The Egyptians experienced this dreadful darkness, and for 3 days could not even see one another; while God’s people had light where they were.
  - ii. God led the people out of Egypt by a pillar of fire at night. (**Exodus 13:21-22**)
    - 1. The pillar stood between the Egyptians and God’s people, casting the Egyptians in darkness, so that they could not attack the Israelites. (**Exodus 14:19-20**)
    - 2. In the Wilderness, it is written, “He led them with a cloud by day, and all night by the light of a fire.” (**Psalm 78:14**, designated **Psalm 77:14** in the LXX)
      - a. I think of this as being like the headlights of a car at night, showing the way ahead in the darkness!
  - iii. “The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of the Lord are

true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold; Yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." (**Psalm 19:8-10**, NKJV)

- iv. "But the ways of the righteous shine like a light; they go before and give light until full daylight. But the ways of the ungodly are dark. They do not know how they stumble." (**Proverbs 4:17-18**, LXX, OSB)
- v. Paul, who had been struck blind for three days on the way to Damascus to teach him an important spiritual lesson (**Acts 9:1-18**), recounts his conversion to King Agrippa. Paul said that Jesus told him, "I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me." (**Acts 26:17-18**, NKJV)
  1. It strikes me that God caused Paul to be blind for three days, to provide a great and unforgettable object lesson to Paul. His new mission would be to open the eyes of those who were spiritually blind. He would thereafter turn people from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the power of God. *This is what evangelism is all about.*
- vi. "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good." (**1 Peter 2:9-14**, NKJV)
  1. Since we have come out of darkness into the marvelous light of Jesus, there are implications for us.
    - a. Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against our souls.
      - i. While the kingdom of God does have laws, being a Christian is so much more than just following a list of rules. It is *living a life that demonstrates the light of God.*

- ii. Let us keep this in mind this every day, in all circumstances. One dangerous area: when we are on the internet. Through media like that we find deadly trap; even through news sites, which seek to enslave us to sin and to destroy our souls.
- b. Live Godly lives among the unbelievers.
  - i. One example I learned of this past year, when travelling in the Mideast, struck me in this regard. I met a Christian who had converted from Islam while in a Muslim country where it is illegal for Christians to evangelize. I asked him how he became a Christian there. He told me that he saw in the lives of the Christians in his country a *totally different spirit*: a kindness totally unlike what he saw in the Muslim culture at large. It made a profound impact on him. He was drawn to the light of their lives, learned about the gospel over time, and ultimately became a Christian there.)
- c. Walking in the light is the basis for submitting to government and all authorities, and for having a submissive attitude even when wronged.
  - i. In the United States at this time, there is great division and animosity between the two main political parties. We are not to be this way as Christians; we belong to a different kingdom. We are simply to submit to the governing authorities and let our lights shine, regardless of which party is in power.
- vii. “Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,” (**Philippians 2:14–15**, NKJV)
  - 1. We are called be light in this world, shining by the way we live: therefore, there should be no complaining or arguing among us.
- j. **Question:** Do you really see the world around you as being in a state of darkness, true spiritual darkness like the 9<sup>th</sup> plague in Egypt, a darkness that can be felt?

- i. Do you see the wealth, the famous, powerful, popular, comfortable people in the world around you as being in darkness? Do you see yourself as having come out of a dark world? That without Christ you would be in utter darkness?
  1. Peter, Paul and Jesus saw the spiritual reality as being that way.
  2. If you see things that way, you can become as bold as they were, seeing everyone as being lost and in darkness.
  3. Evangelism is bringing sight and light to those who are blind and living in utter darkness.
  4. Jesus is “the true light which gives light to every man”, who came into the world to bring light and life into the darkness. **(John 1:4-9)**
- ii. Two kingdoms: kingdom of darkness and kingdom of light
  1. “...giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,” **(Colossians 1:12-13, NKJV)**
  2. That there would be two competing kingdoms, one of light and the other of darkness, was foreshadowed by the contrast between Israel and the Egyptians in the **Exodus** story.
- iii. Being brought out of the kingdom of darkness and into the light of the kingdom of Christ has practical implications for our lives.
  1. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore, He says: ‘Awake, you who sleep; arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.’ See then you that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” **(Ephesians 5:8-16, NKJV)**
- k. Clement of Alexandria, a teacher in the church in Alexandria, Egypt, writing around the year 200 AD made a moving appeal to the unbelieving pagans of



his day. They looked to the centers of knowledge and philosophy (a word that means “loving wisdom”) in the Greek world, in Athens. He graphically points out the darkness in their lives and urges them to seek Christ, the one who brings the true light.

- i. (After speaking of the fall of the first man, Clement continues...) “Man, that had been free by reason of simplicity, was found fettered to sins. The Lord then wished to release him from his bonds, and clothing Himself with flesh – O divine mystery! - vanquished the serpent, and enslaved the tyrant death; and, most marvelous of all, man that had been deceived by pleasure, and bound fast by corruption, had his hands unloosed, and was set free. O mystic wonder! The Lord was laid low, and man rose up; and he that fell from Paradise [*referring to Adam and his descendants – CP*] receives as the reward of obedience something greater than Paradise - namely, heaven itself.
- ii. “Since the Word Himself has come to us from heaven, we need not, I reckon, go any more in search of human learning to Athens and the rest of Greece, and to Ionia. For if we have as our teacher Him that filled the universe with His holy energies in creation, salvation, beneficence, legislation, prophecy, teaching, we have the Teacher from whom all instruction comes; and the whole world, with Athens and Greece, has already become the domain of the Word.
- iii. “...we who have become the disciples of God have received the only true wisdom; and that which the chiefs of philosophy only guessed at, the disciples of Christ have both apprehended and proclaimed.
- iv. “Philosophy... as the ancients say, is ‘a long-lived exhortation, wooing the eternal love of wisdom’; while the commandment of the Lord is far-shining, ‘enlightening the eyes.’ Receive Christ, receive sight, receive thy light, ‘In order that you may know well both God and man.’
- v. “‘Sweet is the Word that gives us light, precious above gold and gems; it is to be desired above honey and the honey-comb.’ For how can it be other than desirable, since it has filled with light the mind which had been buried in darkness, and given keenness to the ‘light-bringing eyes’ of the soul?
- vi. “For just as, had the sun not been in existence, night would have brooded over the universe notwithstanding the other luminaries of heaven; so, had we not known the Word, and been illuminated by Him, we should have been nowise different from fowls that are being fed, fattened in darkness, and nourished for death. Let us then admit the light, that we may admit God. Let us admit the light and become disciples to the Lord.

- vii. "...Let us put away, then, oblivion of the truth (in other words, ignorance); and removing the darkness which obstructs, as dimness of sight, let us contemplate the only true God, first raising our voice in this hymn of praise: 'Hail, O light!' For in us, buried in darkness, shut up in the shadow of death, light has shone forth from heaven, purer than the sun, sweeter than life here below. That light is eternal life; and whatever partakes of it lives. But night fears the light, and hiding itself in terror, gives place to the day of the Lord.
  - viii. "Sleepless light is now over all, and the west has given credence to the east. For this was the end of the new creation. For 'the Sun of Righteousness,' who drives His chariot over all, pervades equally all humanity, like His Father, who makes His sun to rise on all men, and distills on them the dew of the truth. He has changed sunset into sunrise, and through the cross brought death to life; and having wrenched man from destruction, He has raised him to the skies, transplanting mortality into immortality, and translating earth to heaven.
  - ix. [Speaking of the pagan way of life, Clement continues...] "Surely utterly dull and blind, and, like moles, doing nothing but eat, you spend your lives in darkness, surrounded with corruption.
  - x. "But it is truth which cries, 'The light shall shine forth from the darkness.' Let the light then shine in the hidden part of man, that is, the heart; and let the beams of knowledge arise to reveal and irradiate the hidden inner man, the disciple of the Light, the familiar friend and fellow-heir of Christ; especially now that we have come to know the most precious and venerable name of the good Father, who to a pious and good child gives gentle counsels, and commands what is salutary for His child.
  - xi. "He who obeys Him has the advantage in all things, he follows God, obeys the Father, knows Him through wandering, loves God, loves his neighbor, fulfills the commandment, seeks the prize, claims the promise. But it has been God's fixed and constant purpose to save the flock of men: for this end the good God sent the good Shepherd. And the Word, having unfolded the truth, showed to men the height of salvation, that either repenting they might be saved, or refusing to obey, they might be judged. This is the proclamation of righteousness: to those that obey, glad tidings; to those that disobey, judgment."
1. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, pp. 203-204.)
  2. Points that Clement of Alexandria makes here:

- a. Those who are true philosophers (*those who love and seek wisdom*) should not waste their time looking to Athens (or in our day, perhaps corresponding to Boston, Cambridge, New York, Washington DC, London or Beijing).
- b. Don't live life like most people: a hen or goose kept in a dark barn, or like a mole, living in darkness and eating to fatten yourselves until you die!
- c. The true philosophers (*lovers of wisdom*) seek the true Light that has come into the world; the One who came to free us and save us from death. He is the One who brings true light to us. He offers eternal life to those who repent and follow Him.
- d. He is The Light of the World.