



Text: John 8:12 (Read: John 8:12-30)<sup>1</sup>

Series: *Life in His Name* – The Message of John’s Gospel

Title: Part 19 – Following the Light

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Date: February 20, 2011

### **Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” John 8:12**

The worship songs we sang this morning have already declared this truth but let’s root our hearts and minds firmly in God’s Word by reading it in the context in which it appears in the Bible. I’m reading from John’s Gospel, chapter eight verses twelve to thirty. This is God’s Word.

**<sup>12</sup> 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.” <sup>13</sup> So the Pharisees said to him, “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.” <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. <sup>18</sup> I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.” <sup>19</sup> They said to him therefore, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” <sup>20</sup> 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.**

**<sup>21</sup> So he said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.” <sup>22</sup> So the Jews said, “Will he kill himself, since he says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?” <sup>23</sup> He said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. <sup>24</sup> I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” <sup>25</sup> So they said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. <sup>26</sup> I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” <sup>27</sup> They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. <sup>28</sup> So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do**

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.



**nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.<sup>29</sup> And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”<sup>30</sup> As he was saying these things, many believed in him.**

The little word, “again,” that begins this reading connects directly to what we talked about last week. Jesus had come to Jerusalem to participate in the Feast of Booths (7:2), or as it is also called, the Feast of Tabernacles. Last week I shared with you the background story of the daily ritual of the pouring of water on the altar and how, at the most dramatic moment possible in that ceremony, Jesus stood up in the temple and declared...

**“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ” John 7:37-38**

Jesus’ offer of living water was given in the context of this incredibly powerful moment when the Jewish people were gathered around the temple and praying for the outpouring of God’s Spirit upon them in the coming of Messiah. Understanding that ritual within the Feast of Tabernacles adds power and focus to our understanding of Jesus’ words. In the same way, Jesus’ declaration that he is “the light of the world” is connected to a part of the Feast of Tabernacles and understanding that context helps us to understand what Jesus was saying and what he was asking people to do.

What I’m sharing with you this morning is not found in the Old Testament commandments about the keeping of this feast (Leviticus 23) nor in the New Testament account of Jesus’ life and ministry but in a book called the *Mishnah*, composed around 200 AD. The *Mishnah* recorded the decisions of the rabbis about how the Jewish faith was to be practiced in Jesus’ day and it tells us what Jesus would have experienced during the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem.

Each night the priests and temple workers went down into the part of the temple precinct that was called “the Court of the Women.” They would set up four enormous lampstands as high as the walls surrounding the temple. On top of each of these lampstands was set four lamps each holding about 65 litres of oil. Ladders were set up against the stands and the younger priests would haul the oil up and into the lamps and then place rolled rags into the oil to act as a wick. At the right moment, everything was set alight.

It was said that the light from these sixteen lamps not only lit up the temple courtyards but also shone into the streets of the city surrounding the temple. It was recorded in the *Mishnah*, “There was no courtyard in Jerusalem that was not lit up with the light at the libation water-well ceremony.” (Sukkah 5:3)<sup>2</sup> This is in a

---

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in Mitch & Zhava Glaser, *The Fall Feasts of Israel* (Moody Press, 1987), p. 182.



day before street lamps, so the light from these enormous lampstands had a tremendous impact on the spirit of the people during this Feast. By the way, do you know how the tradition of Sunday evening worship services started? It was a response to the invention of internal gas lighting. People came to worship at night because gas lighting was a sight to behold.

The people were in a festive mood at the Feast of Tabernacles and the night-time display of light provoked a profound response. Mitch & Zhava Glaser, in their book, *The Fall Feasts of Israel*, wrote...

“Pious men, members of the Sanhedrin, and heads of different religious schools would dance well into the night holding burning torches and singing songs of praise to God. The Levitical musicians played spirited music with harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets and, as the *Mishnah* says, ‘with other instruments of music without number.’ ... Not only did they play instruments with fervor, but the Levitical choir stood chanting and singing as the leaders of Israel danced. Jerusalem glistened like a diamond that night, and her light could be seen from afar.”<sup>3</sup>

What were these lamps intended to symbolize? New Testament scholar, Gerald Borchert, suggests that...

*The lamps were intended to remind worshipers of God’s leading the people of Israel through the wilderness at night by a pillar of fire. The lighting of lamps also signaled Israel’s recommitment to the God of light ... (m. Sukk. 5:1–4).*<sup>4</sup>

Behind this ceremony were the memories of the Exodus from Egypt and the recurring Old Testament theme of God as the light of his people. Just we sang today about Jesus as the “light of the world,” worshippers in the temple in Jesus’ day sang...

**“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” Psalm 27:1**

**“For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.” Psalm 84:11**

**“Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!” Psalm 80:3**

As these people worshipped in the light of these great lamps their minds would have been awash in Biblical history and truth. They would have been remembering the light of God’s glory and they would have been longing for his

---

<sup>3</sup> Glaser, p. 183

<sup>4</sup> Borchert, G. L. (2001). *Vol. 25A: John 1-11* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (295–296). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.



glory to be seen, not just in the darkened streets of Jerusalem, but throughout the whole, dark world! They would have been longing for the blessing of God's light upon their own lives as the priests intoned over them the blessing again and again...

**“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” Numbers 6:24-26**

This was the moment into which Jesus stepped and declared ...

**“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12**

I want you to notice a little feature of John's account of this moment. He tells us in verse 20...

**“These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple...” John 8:20**

The “treasury” is another term from “the Court of the Women.” Along the side of the Court of the Women were large jars used to hold the tithes and cash offerings that the people brought for the temple upkeep. It was in front of this collection area and standing under the four enormous lamp stands that Jesus spoke these words. It was daytime, the lamps had burned themselves out, the smoke was still in the air, and the people were milling about with memories of the evening's spectacle echoing in their hearts and minds. Into this moment Jesus spoke.

***What did Jesus mean when he said, “I am the light of the world”?***

Let me tell you, he created quite a stir! Given the backdrop of this declaration Jesus was making an astounding claim and those who heard him knew it. Many of those who heard him were his determined opponents, and they tried to tear apart his words and diminish them in several ways but they finally came to the point where they simply and aggressively challenged him...

**“So they said to him, ‘Who are you?’” John 8:25**

The tone of this question is a demand, not a request. Jesus answered them...

**“Just what I have been telling you from the beginning.” John 8:25**

Let's examine what Jesus told them. **First** of all, Jesus said to them...

**“I am...” John 8:12**



You might casually read a simple verb and pronoun here but there is much more under the surface that you need to see and hear. Jesus constructed this sentence very carefully and to help you understand what's going on here, I'm going to teach you two Greek words. Here they are. The first word is...

**Ego ... which means, "I."**

It's a pronoun and it simply means, "I." The second word is a verb and it's...

**Eimi ... which means "I am."**

Put them together and you get...

**Ego eimi ... "I am"**

"I am" with an emphasis on the "I." Why is this important? Well, Jesus could have simply said, "*eimi*...I am the light of the world," but he didn't. He chose to add "*ego*" to it and there is a reason why that is important.

We have to go way back to almost the beginning of God's relationship with the Jewish people. The Jews were in slavery in Egypt. A Jewish man by the name of Moses had escaped from Egypt and was living in the dessert of Sinai. God spoke to him one day as he was tending his flock and told him to go back to Egypt and to lead the people of Israel out of slavery and into the Land of Promise. Moses asked God, "If the people of Israel ask me your name, what shall I tell them?"

**"God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:14**

In the Bible of Jesus' day, "I AM" was **ego eimi**.

Jump forward centuries. God's people are in trouble again. Some are already enslaved, some are about to be enslaved. God speaks to his people again, this time through a prophet named Isaiah. God said...

**"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior." Isaiah 43:10-11**

In the Bible of Jesus' day, "I am he" was **ego eimi**. Are you beginning to catch the sense of what Jesus is saying? Jesus was saying, "I am God your Saviour." He was declaring, "I want you to know and believe and understand that 'I am' has come to lead you out of slavery to sin and into peace."



If you study John's Gospel you'll find "**ego eimi**" again and again. Sometimes you'll find it connected to a statement of Jesus' work...

**"I AM the bread of life." John 6:35**  
**"I AM the light of the world." John 8:12**  
**"I AM the door of the sheep." John 10:7**  
**"I AM the good shepherd." John 10:11**  
**"I AM the resurrection and the life" John 11:25**  
**"I AM the way, the truth and the life" John 14:6**  
**"I AM the true vine" John 15:1**

Sometimes you'll find it standing all alone. When the woman at the well in Samaria said to Jesus, "I know that Messiah is coming," Jesus answered...

**"The one who is speaking to you is ego eimi." John 4:26**

When Jesus' disciples were frightened when they saw him walking on the Sea of Galilee and coming toward their boat, Jesus said to them...

**"Ego eimi; do not be afraid." John 6:20**

And when Jesus diagnosed the essence of the spiritual problem of his opponents he said to them...

**"I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he – ego eimi -- you will die in your sins." John 8:24**

And as the conversation with his opponents continued to unfold, Jesus said to them...

**"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.' So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple."  
John 8:58-59**

One day, many years ago, I was on my way to work in Toronto. I came out of the subway station and there by the exit was a man holding the literature of a religious group who do not believe that Jesus is the "I Am." You've probably had these seem people visit your door. I walked past him, intending to simply proceed to work but the Spirit of God told me to walk back and speak to him. And the Spirit put one Scripture on my heart. I said to the man, "I need to share something with you. The Bible says that "Unless you believe that Jesus is "I Am" you are dead in your sins." You will die and you will spend eternity without God." He reacted much the same way that Jesus' opponents did when he told them the same thing – he became very angry and I don't blame him. It's a life and death issue. Either you take Jesus as the "I Am" who has come to save you or you have no Saviour for "beside him there is no savior."



**Secondly**, Jesus said to his opponents...

**“I am the light...” John 8:12**

He didn't say that he was “a light;” he said that he was “the light.” He isn't “one among many lights” from which we can choose; he alone is the “true light” (1:9) who has come into the world.

This is “God-talk.” This kind of statement is absolute and total. The very first act of God that is recorded in the Bible was when God said...

**“Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Genesis 1:3**

God is the source of light as much as he is the source of life. The Psalms declare of God...

**“For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.” Psalm 36:9**

John has already spoken those words of Jesus when he wrote...

**“In him was life, and that life was the light of men.” John 1:4**

Everything that can be said of God in terms of light and life can be said of Jesus. Jesus and the Father are one – Jesus and the Father are “light and life.”

Light gives life and light also reveals, and in Jesus we see God fully revealed. The Apostle Paul wrote...

**“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:6**

As the people celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus' words about being “the light” would have been understood as another of his claims to equality with the Father and that is why his opponents wanted to stone him to death. They understood exactly what Jesus was saying. He was saying to them: “You've been asking God to shine his face upon you. You've been dancing and singing and praying for my light to dawn. Well, here I am.”

**Thirdly**, Jesus said to them...

**“I am the light of the world.” John 8:12**

**Whoever or whatever Jesus is, he is it for everyone!** Jesus isn't “the light” or the “I am” for just a few people or for some people. He is the Saviour of the



world, he is the “the way, the truth and the life” for all people. He’s the “I Am” for people in India and Brazil, just as he is “the light” for people in Canada and Russia. He is “the light of the world” for people who live in jungles and for those who live in cities. He is “I AM” for Hindus and Buddhists and he is “the light” for Muslims and Christians.

We live in a day and age that prefers the idea of multiple Saviors, if in fact, anyone needs saving at all. But Jesus will not allow himself to be considered as one among many saviors; he is unique; he is the Only One; he is “the light of the world.” The apostles understood and believed in Jesus’ vision. They declared...

**“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12**

Many today would believe that holding to an exclusive faith in a unique saviour would make us dangerous to world community and world peace. Bruce Milne was the pastor of First Baptist Church in Vancouver. He worked in an urban, cosmopolitan, ethnically and religiously diverse environment for many years. He wrote...

*While the Christian will certainly identify with the goal of world community, and with the elimination of ancient prejudices in every sphere, including religion, there is a point beyond which the Christian cannot go. **Jesus stands alone, because of who he is.** In him alone God in person has come to us and made himself known to us. ... He alone has atoned for our human sin through his unique sacrifice. He alone therefore is the way to God. Whatever insights other religions may have to contribute, they cannot bring us to God.<sup>5</sup>*

“Who are you?” they asked him. “I am the light of the world,” he told them. “I am the pillar of fire you followed through the wilderness and I’ve come again to lead you to peace. I am the One who is the source of light and I’ve come to give you life.” And then he asked them a question ...

**“Will you follow me?”**

He didn’t ask it in the form of a question but in the form of a promise but it was a question none the less. He said to them...

**“Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12**

Usually in these moments in John’s Gospel the invitation is to “believe” in Jesus or to “receive” him but here Jesus fits his invitation to the moment in which he

---

<sup>5</sup> Milne, B. (1993). *The message of John : Here is your king! : With study guide.* The Bible speaks today (130). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press.



stood. There in the Court of the Women with the lamp stands as mute reminders of the night's celebration, Jesus called to their minds the years that their ancestors had followed the pillar of fire through the wilderness and he invited them to "follow" him now just as those ancient Israelites had followed the Lord through the wilderness.

***How do we respond to Jesus' invitation to "follow" him?***

**First** of all, to "follow" Jesus' invitation to follow him is also an invitation to "believe" in him. He told his opponents...

**"unless you believe that I am he [ego eimi] you will die in your sins." John 8:24**

"Following" Jesus means that we accept his declaration that he is "I AM" who has come to save us. It means accepting his revelation that he is God come to earth. It means believing that he is "the light of the world" and that there is no other. It means believing in him and him alone.

"Following" Jesus means believing that God died for us on the cross to bear our punishment for sin. Jesus said to his opponents...

**"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he [ego eimi]..." John 8:28**

Either we can die for our own sins and bear the punishment for all eternity or we can "follow" Jesus and believe that his death on the cross was a death for us, a death in which God actually bore our punishment for sin.

Do you believe this? Do you believe that Jesus, God comes in the flesh, died on the cross to take your punishment for sin?

To "follow" Jesus certainly means to "believe" in him but it means more than just what happens in our hearts and minds.

**Secondly**, to "follow" the One who is "the light of the world" means to live in a way that reflects His light. Jesus said to those who believed in him...

**"You are the light of the world ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:14-16**

There are so many sad stories that come out of the Middle East. However, Skye Jethani, in his book, *The Divine Commodity*, tells the story of a church in Baghdad and of a pastor who lived the light of Jesus. Jethani wrote...



*Ghassan Thomas leads one of the few public churches that emerged [in Baghdad] after Saddam Hussein was toppled. His congregation erected a sign on their building that said "Jesus Is the Light of the World," but the church was raided by bandits who left behind a threat on a piece of cardboard. It read: "Jesus is not the light of the world, Allah is, and you have been warned." The note was signed "The Islamic Shiite Party."*

*In response, Pastor [Thomas] loaded a van with children's gifts and medical supplies—which were in critically short supply following the American invasion—and drove to the headquarters of the Islamic Shiite Party. After presenting the gifts and supplies to the sheikh, [Thomas] told the leader, "Christians have love for you, because our God is a God of love." He then asked permission to read from the Bible. [Thomas] turned to Jesus' words in John 8, "I am the light of the world." He then showed the cardboard note to the sheikh. The Muslim leaders, astounded by Pastor Thomas's actions, apologized.*

*"This will not happen again," [the sheikh] vowed. "You are my brother. If anyone comes to kill you, it will be my neck first." The sheikh later attended Pastor Thomas's ordination service at the church.<sup>6</sup>*

Pastor Thomas and his people believed in “the light of the world” and lived as “the light of the world” – that’s what “following” Jesus means. What will that look like for you and me? How will we “follow” Jesus here in Olds? What will we do so that people can see His light shining in our lives?

Finally...

### ***What does Jesus promise to those who “follow” him?***

He said...

**“Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12**

To “walk in darkness” is to live a life away from God’s light that leads to eternal darkness and death (cf. 1 John 1:5-2:1). To “walk in ... the light of life” is to live a life with Jesus that leads to eternal life. What Jesus is promising to those who follow him is that the life he gives them will never be swallowed up by the darkness of the grave. The life that Jesus offers to us gives us the confidence to face even death with the assurance that it holds no fear for us. The Psalmist declared...

---

<sup>6</sup> Skye Jethani, *The Divine Commodity* (Zondervan, 2009), pp. 61-62 © 2011 PreachingToday.com



**“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” Psalm 27:1**

Kent Hughes tells the story of a young man who accepted Jesus’ invitation to follow him and whose life radiated the light and life of Jesus. Hughes wrote...

*Greg Valdemi was a remarkably handsome boy. When he visited our college department and saw that we had some attractive girls, he stuck around. And as he did, what he heard being taught began to click. In the fall of 1973 Greg unreservedly gave his life to Christ. He was marvelously born again and became an overflowing Christian. He could not get enough of the Bible. He was there whenever the church was open and was always full of questions. He was a witnessing Christian and a great encouragement to me. One New Year’s Eve he did what people that age often do—he stayed out all night with the college group. They had breakfast together, and after breakfast they decided they would have a football game—their own Rose Bowl. But as they were out on the athletic field warming up, Greg collapsed. By the time I got there, before the paramedics arrived, Greg had died of heart failure. It was an unspeakably difficult time for his poor mother and a terrible experience for all his relatives and friends. Yet when I recall his home-going and his funeral, the general impression I have is one of joy and of the presence of Christ.*

*Several years [later] as I was preparing to step into the pulpit, I noticed a tall, radiant woman who came into the back of the church and found a seat. She glowed throughout my message. ... At the end of the service, meeting me at the door, she gave me a big hug. That lady was Greg Valdemi’s mother. At [Greg’s] memorial service, [his] witness and the witness of his friends was clearly presented, and his mother was deeply moved. She returned to her home in Oregon, began attending a little church I recommended, and was marvelously converted. That day in church I saw in her eyes the same light and joy I had seen in her son’s. She was a witnessing, dynamic, excited, overflowing Christian. She was involved in Bible study and was leading other people to Christ.*

Listen to what Hughes wrote...

*In the midnight of her life, she had looked to the cross and had seen Jesus for what he is, the eternal I AM. Upon believing in Christ, she was lifted from the realm of darkness into the realm of light. She became part of the kingdom above. The same life that had been her son’s was now hers.<sup>7</sup>*

Have you been ‘lifted from the realm of darkness into the realm of light’? Are you following Jesus? Have you believed in him? Are you living for him and allowing his life and light, his joy and peace, to flow through you?

---

<sup>7</sup> Hughes, R. K. (1999). *John : That you may believe*. Preaching the Word (241–242). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.



Jesus said...

**“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

- **Invitation to Prayer Ministry**
- **Final Song:** Jesus Messiah
- **Benediction**