

Series: I Am

**I am the Light of the World**

Sermon by Matt Ellis

John 8:12

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, March 23, 2025

Good morning, Waterstone. My name is Paul, and I am one of the pastors here on staff, and today I am really excited. We are continuing our series, the “I am” statements of the faith from John, and you may have noticed over the last few months that I have been doing a lot of preaching as we have started this new year and we have transitioned from Larry to me as lead pastor, and that has been very intentional. As we started this year, we wanted to give me a little bit of space to find my voice and for us to get to know each other a little bit better as lead pastor, but over the next few months, you are going to start to see that we are going to have some guest speakers come in to preach for us, and that is very intentional. One, it is a way for me to make sure my family does not burn out from having to be gone every single weekend, but really, the bigger reason we want to invite other people in to preach for us is because at Waterstone we have a deep desire to have a multiplicity of voices. We do not believe that a church, any church, is just God speaking to one person who is speaking to a congregation, that we are all in the priesthood of believers, and so we want to make sure that we invite other people onto this space to preach and to lead. It is to teach you, and so I am really excited, because today we have Matt Ellis who is going to be preaching for us, and some of you may know Matt. He has been a long time at Waterstone. Actually, back in the day before I was a youth pastor here, he was a youth pastor here. I actually have not told him this, but when I came to become youth pastor, I cleaned out the youth closet, and I found a bunch of stuff with Matt’s name on it, and so we both have a heart for the youth of Waterstone, but then Waterstone sent him to plant a church, Hope Crossing, and he did that for a number of years, serving the Lord in a really intense community and situation, and then most recently he has been working on his doctorate, and he is going to tell you a little bit about that and some of the classes that he has been teaching and stuff, so we are really excited to have him today. Would you just welcome Matt to preach to us today as we continue today? I am serious. Thank you.

Matt: Thank you. It is so good to be here. It feels like home. It is home for me and my family. So many stories. If these walls could talk, I might go to jail, but the statute of limitations is passed. That sounded really weird. I did not mean, I meant like church van stuff by that. My wife and I have not been coming here in the last several weeks, a couple of months, because I have been teaching a class at another local church about fatherhood and discipleship, because as goes the father, so goes the home. As goes the home, so goes the neighborhood. As goes the neighborhood, so goes the nation. Fathers are so important that we are teaching our fathers how to disciple their kids, so important, but we have been listening online to the “I Am” series and it has been very good, because what we think about Jesus, what we think about God is so important, because it shapes who we are. If we know about Jesus, Jesus said this, He said, “to see me is to see the Father,” and one of my favorite bearded theologians said this a few weeks ago. He said, “What we believe about God shapes who we are.” Today, “I am the light of the world.” Read it with

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

Okay, this is a very big claim, and I think that when we read it today in 2025, we do not get how big a claim this was, but the original audience would have gotten it. He is claiming to be everything. In 1899, Nikola Tesla, you have heard that name, he was a scientist. He made this controversial statement that has been debated ever since. He said that everything is made of light. Everything is made of light, and nobody has really disproven it since. Light is not matter, and matter is not light, but photons are in matter, and photons are what hold things together. Light holds everything together. You would think Jesus would have known that when He said, “I am the light of the world.” If you read back in chapter one, verse 19 in John, the original readers would have gotten this part, when John says this about Jesus. He says, put that up there. John 1:14, he says, “through Him all things were made. Without Him, nothing was made that was made.” Jesus is the source of life. He is the source of everything we have ever wanted. He is the source of hope, peace, and purpose. He gives our life direction, and He says to us, “Follow me, and I will give you everything you need. I will get you where you are going. Follow me. I am the light of the world, the source, hope, peace, and purpose.”

The original audience would not have missed what He was saying here. They would not have missed it. In fact, this whole light of the world idea would have been fresh on their minds, because this was the end of the feast of booths, and the feast of booths was an eight-day celebration where they would set up these booths and tents, all the people of Israel. The Old Testament commanded that they do this. They would get these booths or tents, and they would make them out of sticks, and the families would live in these booths for eight days, and this celebration was to remind them of the time in Exodus when they were leaving Egypt, and God did all of these wonders to bring them out of Egypt, and so all the families, it was like church camp, but it was a lot more fun, because there was wine. The wine was flowing, and there was lots of fire. We are going to talk about that in a minute, but it was like church camp. All of the cousins were there, and all of your friends were there, and the celebrations, the ceremonies. There was one celebration where they would have bread, and it would remind them of the manna that God provided, and a few weeks ago, Paul talked about how Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.” They had a celebration talking about that. They had a celebration talking about the water. They had the ceremony, because God did this wonderful miracle where He provided water out of the rock and all of these wonders, and then on the last night, some say it took place on every night, but at least the last night there were these large candles or torches that were in the temple courts. They were 75 feet tall, and the priests would climb up to the top of these pillars, and they would light up these huge flames, and it is said that the whole city of Jerusalem, see the temple was on a hill, and so the whole city of Jerusalem would be lit up, and in the streets would be the Jewish men and boys, and they would dance with torches, and they would sing. They would sing, “You are the light of the world. Whom shall I fear?” “The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?” That is Psalm 27. They would sing this.

What Jesus was saying in that moment, He is saying that light in the wilderness that led you, what they call the Shekinah glory, the presence of God, He steps forward, and He says, “That is me.” Everybody listening would have known this verse and would have known about the pillar, Exodus 13: “and the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night a pillar of fire to

give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. Jesus says, “Follow me. I am going to get you where you are going. That pillar of fire, that was me.” They would not have missed this. They would not have missed this. Jesus said this while He was standing in the temple courts, perhaps even at night, when the torches were lit up. They would not have missed this: “I am the light of the world. Follow me. I will get you where you are going. Follow me. I am the one that is worth orienting your life around.” Jesus is the only one worth orienting our life around.

How many of you have ever experienced absolute darkness, and I do not mean like in the closet in your house when you are hiding from your kids because you took the last of the Oreo cookies, not that kind of darkness, because light can come in under the door, and when a little bit of light comes in your eyes, they can orient, but if there is not any light at all, your eyes can’t adjust, and they will not orient. When you are hiding in the closet, you can see little frames and shadows of things, but when there is absolute darkness, your eyes do not orient.

When I was in college, Bible college in Santa Cruz, California, we would have these bonfires on the beach, and one night very late after we had this bonfire, two of my buddies and I went walking up the beach, and we found this cave, and we decided we were going to explore this cave, and so one of my buddies had a little light, one of those little key chain lights, and it was enough to light that cave up enough for us to get inside, and it was a pretty wide cave, like the hallways here, and it would open up into this big room, like about the size of the Hub, and that little light was enough to get us back into this cave, probably about 125 yards, and then the light started flickering, and the light went out, and within a few seconds, my instinct was to get on my hands in my knees, and to just crawl and try to find my way out, but when there is no light, and it is just darkness, we forgot even which way we came from. We forgot where we were going. We did not know which way would get us out. There was this deep loneliness that came over us. Even though we were together, there was this deep loneliness, and then there was this fear, and all we wanted to do was to get out of the darkness.

How many remember, children of the 80s and 90’s, the movie *Lost Boys*, and it was in Santa Cruz, California, and it was about vampires that lived in the caves in Santa Cruz. I did not see the movie. I was in Bible college. We started hearing voices in the back of the cave, and then we were really scared, and one of my buddies pulled a little lighter out from his pocket. I do not know why this Bible college student in Santa Cruz had a lighter in his pocket, but even just the flicker of the flint was enough, and old lighters, they sometimes they do not light. You just flicker them. Well, sometimes it would light, but it was enough to get us out of the cave. It was enough to give us hope that we could move, and we could take little steps and get out of the cave. It was enough to give us some direction. Jesus is the only light that exists that is worth orienting our lives around.

Imagine being with Israel, and you were there when the pillar of fire came down, and it stood between you and the armies of Egypt. Remember that part when the armies of Egypt were pursuing, and they were chasing Israel, and the pillar of fire came down, and it protected Israel. Imagine you were there, and then fast forward a few days, and the pillar is leading you through the dark night. Imagine having been there, and then imagine Moses goes up the mountain to get the Ten Commandments and the Shekina glory, which is the presence of God, the light of God, the presence of God on the earth. That is what the rabbis called the Shekinah glory.

It goes up the mountain with Moses, and you are there for forty days, and Moses and the Shekinah glory are up on the mountain, and in your mind, you are thinking, “We need something to follow. We need a light to guide us,” and remember what they did. Moses came down the mountain, and they had made a golden calf, and Aaron told them. He said, “This is what got you out of Egypt. This is what protected you. This is what guided you.” Can you imagine after seeing the pillar of fire, saying, “Oh, there is this other light that we are going to follow, and this light is going to give us hope, and this light is going to give us peace, and this light is going to give us purpose.” Stupid Hebrews.

We are not that stupid. We follow money sometimes. That will give us the light we are looking for. If we could just make a little bit more money, I would have hope. I would have peace. I would have purpose. It would give my life direction. If my family were just a little bit more well-behaved, then I would have a reason to move on, and I would have purpose and hope and direction, and I would have guidance for my life. If I could just lose ten pounds, okay, fifteen pounds. If I could just lose fifteen pounds, then life would be good. I would have hope, peace, and purpose. If I could just get that job, the position that I have always wanted, then my life would be good. I would have hope. I would have peace. I would have purpose. Life would be good.

In 2005, Tom Brady, the greatest, I have a hard time saying this, because I grew up a Joe Montana fan, the greatest quarterback of all time, Tom Brady, sorry for the 49ers fans. I am not sorry, Broncos fans. The greatest quarterback of all time, in 2005 he had three rings. He had won three Super Bowls, and he was being interviewed, and maybe some of you saw this interview. It was twenty years ago. He was being interviewed, and the guy that was interviewing him on 60 Minutes, says, “So you have arrived. Everything you have always followed, in a sense, all the light you have always followed, everything that you have worked hard for ever since you were a kid, all your dreams have come true. What is it like?” and he said, “Well, I do not sleep any better at night.” He said, “I thought there would be more. There has to be more to life than this.” Tom Brady had everything, even in 2005. Now he has four. He had everything with three Super Bowls. “There has to be more life.”

You are not Tom Brady. You probably will never have as much money as Tom Brady has. Most of us in this room will never be as handsome as Tom Brady is. Nobody else. He was still empty. He still thought there should be more to life. In the interview, the guy who was interviewing him says, “Oh, you can’t sleep well at night? Is that because there is nobody in your bed next to you to share your life with?” If you just had the right person in bed next to you to share life with, maybe then, in a sense, then you will have arrived, and you know what happened? He married a supermodel, Giselle Bundchen, and how did that end up? It ended in divorce. It did not bring him the hope, the peace, the purpose, the life. It was not the light. That light that he had been chasing, it was a false light. It did not do it for him. Jesus says, “I am the light of the world. Follow me. I will get you where you are going. I will get you the hope, peace, and purpose, and meaning in life that you are looking for,” only Jesus, only Jesus, none of the false lights that we think that we should have. The true light of the world exposes these false lights to be nothing. They did not get us there.

In the passage, Jesus says, “You are not going to walk in darkness.” Now those that were listening, they would know the idea of darkness from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, there are several things. In the Old Testament when it talked about darkness, it would bring up the issue of sin. Walking in

sin, that was darkness. Now sin is when we think that we know better than God, and we are going to do things our way, and we rebel against God, and we do things that hurt us, and they hurt others, and we oftentimes do not even know why we are being hurt or what is hurting us. This passage in Proverbs that says, “The way of the wicked is like deep darkness. They do not know what they stumble over.” When we chase the false lights, and there is no darkness, sometimes we do not even put the two together. We do not connect the dots.

I have a friend who has buffalo up in Evergreen, and he talks about how he had these barbed wire fences, and he would electrify them. It did not matter what he did. The buffalo, if they wanted to, just kept walking right through the fence. It would cut them. It would tear them up, and their brains were so small that they did not even connect with the pain that they were going through. It was because the barbed wire was cutting them, and so they would just keep going and just keep pushing through the barbed wire fence. Sometimes we do not even connect the dots. Our sin, when we are in darkness, we do not even know what we are stumbling over. We do not even know what is hurting us so badly.

In the Old Testament, darkness also is separation from God. When the Israelites walked, they had to walk behind the pillar in a sense, or under the pillar of fire so that they could see where they were going. Darkness in the Old Testament also represents the final judgment. We are going to be before the throne in judgment. We are going to be there, but we are not going to receive the final judgment because of what the light of the world did for us, not because of what we did. He cleaned us. He cleanses us. When we submit our lives to Him, He cleanses us. We do not, and He takes the final judgment upon Himself. That is what happened on the cross. What should have happened to us, happened to Him, and so we get to go free. When we are in front of the judge in the final days, the gavel falls, and we are innocent. We are free to go, because what God the Father sees in front of Him is princes and princesses. We are his children because of what Jesus did for us. In First John 1:9, He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. First Peter 3:18: “for Christ suffered once for sin, the righteous for the unrighteous.”

There is this thing that Boeing is working with on their airplanes. I do not know if they have implemented this yet, but this is really cool. They have been experimenting with this. When you go into the bathroom on a plane, and you are done, and you walk out, and the door closes behind you, for three seconds this really strong, bright light comes on, and it cleans 99.999% of all the germs and the bacteria that are in the bathroom, because light cleanses. That is better than Lysol, because Lysol is 99.998%, and I only know that because of Covid, right? This light cleanses. Jesus, the light of the world, that is what cleanses us. We do not cleanse ourselves. We do not behave ourselves into a relationship with God. The light of the world cleanses us. The light of the world says, “Follow me. I will get you where I am going.

In the Old Testament, darkness also represented hopelessness. The light of the world chases away hopelessness. Some of you have been here. Some of you have felt this hopelessness, and it found a spark. A week ago today, at 1:30 p.m. a friend of mine who is a pastor in the area, he had a son, thirty-one years old, in Highlands Ranch. He was out walking his dog, my friend’s thirty-one-year-old son out walking his dog on a Sunday afternoon, and he was hit by a car and killed instantly. A couple of days later, my friend posted this on social media: “Comfort us, Lord Jesus. In these hard and early hours of loss, be our strength and light, for we are shocked and numbed as people spilled into cold seas, stunned amidst the sudden wreckage of our ship. Do you see that flicker?”

Do you see the flicker of hope that that family has? Because they know that the light of the world has overcome death, and they know because of what the light of the world did, because the tomb is empty, because of the resurrection, they know that their son is going to resurrect again someday, and they are going to get to see him, and right now in their lives and again some of you have been here, there is a flicker. There is a flicker. Jesus says, "Follow me. I will get you there." Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Follow me. Whoever follows me will not live in darkness." We are not going to live in those places. We are not going to live in sin. Yes, we are going to make mistakes. Yes, but we are not going to stay there. "I am the light of the world. Follow me. I will get you where you are going."

He goes on, and He says, "Whoever follows me will have the light of the world." You will have the light of the world, and we get the light of the world when we surrender to Jesus and what He did on the cross, when we stop following our hearts. Scripture says in Jeremiah 17:9 that the heart is deceitful above all else, and it is not to be trusted, but in our culture, isn't that the thing we are told, "follow your heart"? If I had followed my heart, I mean, just being really honest, several times, if I had followed my heart, I would be out of here. I am glad I did not follow my heart. Follow the light of the world. In Matthew 5, Jesus says, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. You are the light of the world." In Matthew 13:43, "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

Going back to Israel, when they left Egypt, Moses would go encounter the Shekinah glory of God, the presence of Jesus, whether it was in the tent or on the mountain top, and he would come down, and he would have to wear a veil on his face, because his face would so shine that the people did not want to look at him and did not want to be around him, so he had to wear this veil because the Shekina glory in a sense charged him up. He came down the mountain or came out of the tent of meeting, and he just lit it up, and the people shied away, because that is sometimes what we do. When the lights go on, we shy away, because we have been in the darkness for so long. In John, we read that the light of the world came, and we liked the darkness better, and so we shied away from the light. We wanted to stay in the darkness.

Another thing about the booths that they would sleep in at night during the Feast of Tabernacles, they had roofs, but they were just made out of sticks, and it was just enough roof so that at night they could see the stars, and it would remind them again of the light of the world. It would remind them of the pillar of fire that would lead them. It was there to remind them, and it would give enough shade during the hot sun during the day, and the booths anticipated the return of the Shekina glory of God, like in the booth or Tabernacle that Moses met with Jesus, and he would show up, and he would come out shining like that. These booths that they would sleep in were a foreshadow, and they said, "It is cool He is going to come back. He is going to dwell here with us." The glory of God is going to dwell here with us, and Jesus steps into that and says, "Here I am. I am the light of the world. Follow me. I am going to get you where you are going,"

Then fast forward, Jesus said, "I am going to send the Holy Spirit." Fast forward into that upper room in Acts chapter two, and all the followers of Christ are around in this room, and they are praying, and they are worshiping, and can you imagine being there? This pillar of fire comes into the room, and it splits into tongues of fire, and the Shekina glory of God has just come down, and it rests on their heads, and the Shekina glory of God is now in us, in you and me. In Acts we learn that this promise, the promise of the Holy Spirit, the Shekinah glory of God, you being the light of the world, that promise "is for you

and your children, and for all those who are far off.” That is us. That is you. You have it. You have the light of the world, and our job is to go and to shine. Go shine. We go, and we shine. We are a danger. You, the light of the world, is danger to the darkness, because you know what, the light always wins. You don’t open the door of your house, and the darkness just overtakes the light. That does not happen. You turn the light on, and the light overcomes the darkness every time. The light always wins. The light overcomes.

I love this verse, Second Corinthians. Remember back to Moses and his veiled face. Well, Second Corinthians 3:18, “and we all with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord and his Spirit.” What he is saying here is maybe when we start out, we are not shining all that well. We are not doing our job. We are not living our purpose very well, but the Holy Spirit, He changes us, and as if we were mirrors that were dirty, He is shining us, and for some of us, it takes longer than others. He is shining us so that we can reflect, and we are changing from one level of glory to the next.

You know what glory is? Glory is like this. It is hard to put in words, but when you are out in Aurora or Centennial and you start driving west this way, what is the thing that you notice? If you live in Littleton or Lakewood, you notice this when you’re out that way and you’re driving back this way. You see what? The mountains, and you do not have words for it. Yes man, we should move to Aurora. No, there is no good reason to move to Aurora, maybe the mountains, the glory. That’s glory, and that’s what this is saying about us. We have the light of the world, and we are reflecting the glory of Jesus, the glory of the light of the world to the world. That’s your job. That’s my job. We go into dark places. Wherever there is injustice, wherever there is pain, wherever there is hopelessness, we go. Waterstone church, you go, and you light it up. I have been around Waterstone long enough to know that you do that. You go into dark places, and you light it up. This is what you were made for in the image of God, to reflect his glory to the world. We were made for his glory. Waterstone, go live out your purpose. Go to these dark places and light it up.

I learned this about light this week. This is cool. When you are sleeping at night, and the lights are on in the next room, you do not even know it. You can’t even see it with your eyes, but there are sensors in your body, in your skin and in your brain, that know the light in the room next door is on, and you will not sleep as well. When we go into our neighborhoods, when we go into our places of work, people are going to know, but we are not going to hide it under a bushel. We are not going to hide it under a bushel. We are not going to hide it under a bushel, no. We are going to let it shine, and you know what? When we go out and we shine with the glory of the light of the world, people wake up. They wake up, and revival comes. The light of the world is the God of revival, and when we go and shine, people wake up.

You know what we have a reputation for sometimes? Not you, sometimes Christians get a reputation for cursing the darkness. We are not going to do that. We are not going to curse the darkness. If you do not like what is going on in your public schools, go become a teacher in the public schools and shine. If you do not like what is going on in Washington or in politics, you become a politician, and you go shine. We are not going to be people that curse the darkness. We are going to be people that go and shine, because we are a little light of the world, and this is our job, to go to dark places, and to shine. You have the light of the world. You have the light of the world. You are the light of the world, and you know what? When we go into those dark places, when we go to those dark places, here’s what we say: “Follow me. I will get you where you need to go. I know where to find hope, peace, and purpose. Follow me.”

Back in the late 1800s, there was a group of missionaries that they called the One Way missionaries. Has anybody ever heard of the One Way missionaries? What they would do is they would pack all their clothing and all their personal belongings in coffins, because they were making a statement. They were saying, “We are going to go to dark places, and even if it costs us our life, we are not going to come back. We are going to these dark places, and we are going to light it up.” There was a guy. His name was A.W. Mullen. A.W. Mullen felt that God was calling him to a dark place. He was one of these one-way missionaries, and he was going to go to the island of New Hebrides in the South Pacific, right near Fiji. Now we call it Vanuatu. Just two years before he left to go to Vanuatu with his coffin packed, two years before, another missionary showed up there, and he was eaten. He was cannibalized. I spent some time in in Fiji around this area, and I will come back to that. Remind me, I will tell you that story about my time in Fiji, but he was there for many years. A.W. Mullen was there for many years, and after twenty-five years of being there, this was what was said of Vanuatu, the little island. They said that everybody on the island now knew and had and was living a life surrendered to the light of the world, because he went there, and he lit it up, and people woke up, and there was revival. This is what they put on the epitaph on his headstone in Vanuatu. It says: “When he came, there was no light, and when he left, there was no darkness,” because that is what we do, and that first missionary that went there, he brought some light. He brought some light. His life was not in vain. He did not lose his life in vain. He brought some light. Man, I want that to be said about me.

Back to my friends in Fiji. I was there. I was a missionary there for a little bit, and it is so full of a lot of people that follow Christ and love Jesus in that area on those islands, and they would tease me. They said “Matt, it is okay. We ate your grandpa. My grandpa ate your grandpa, but you do not have to worry because we ate your grandpa. We couldn’t eat his boots because they were too tough.” They ate everything except for the soles of his shoes, because they said they were really rough. They could not boil them down enough to eat them, and they would tease me. They thought it was so funny to tease me about this. They said “Matt, we ate your great, great grandpa, but don’t worry, we are not going to be able to eat all of you, but your sandals are soft,” so they were trying to tell me they were going to eat me with my sandals. They would be able to eat those, because they were soft. Anyways, they thought it was so funny to joke about eating me, and they would laugh, and they would laugh and laugh, but light of the world, light of the world. That place is a place that is on fire with light now, all because A.W. Mullen answered the call to go to dark places, to light it up. In our workplaces and our schools, in our neighborhoods, we do not curse the darkness, but we light it up, and we say, “Follow me. I can get you hope, peace and purpose and life and everything you need.”

Do you remember the stickers that used to come in the cereal boxes, and they were little stars, and you put them on your ceiling in your bedroom, and then you turn the lights off you would lie there, and they would just glow? Did anybody ever do that in your room, or do you do it for your kids in that room? They just glow. It is so cool, and then you wake up at 3:00 in the morning, because you hear the boogeyman in your room, and you open your eyes, and the lights are burned out. Do you know what I am talking about? They are not bright anymore, and the reason they are not bright anymore is because they can only reflect the light that we put in them. You are the light of the world, but the light comes from outside of you, and we only reflect the light that we put in.



Help me out. "This little light of mine, I am going to let it shine. This little light of mine, I am going to let it shine." If you are here this morning, and you are in a dark place, or if you are here this morning, you have not experienced the light of the world in your life, I would love to talk to you after the service. Paul would love to talk to you. If you have not surrendered to the light of the world, today is a good day. We have baptisms coming up. Today is a good day. I would love to talk to you. Paul would love to talk to you. Let me give us a benediction. and we will be on our way. Now, may we, Waterstone Community Church, go to dark places. Whether it is at your workplace, it is your school, or around the world, may we go to dark places and light them up. May we go in peace, amen.

40:29 minutes

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Edited by Tom Kenaston

Message #835