



The Gospel of John

Session 18: Jesus the light of the World

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

In this week's lesson, we encounter Jesus's second "I am" statement—"I am the light of the world." This statement included a directive, "follow me," as well as a promise, "[you] will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life."

This week, think beyond spiritual blindness in unbelievers to reflect on ways Christians also struggle with "seeing" and "walking" in the light of Jesus in daily life.

As a group, consider ways to spiritual sight, and block out the things that distract and keep you from focusing on Christ.

The Pharisees had every spiritual resource available—education, access to the written Torah, authority in the temple—yet they lacked faith. Challenge your class to look beyond collecting knowledge to lean into other ways in which we "follow Jesus" daily.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

John 8:12-20

THE MAIN IDEA

Jesus's statement, "I am the light of the world" comes with a mandate and a promise. We are called to follow Him, and He promises to give us the light of life.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Like the Pharisees, how might we be tempted to settle for an intellectual relationship rather than a living, vibrant relationship with God through Christ?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

John 8:12 Jesus declared, "I am the light of the world." Jesus identified with God's use of and representation by light throughout the Old Testament. Spiritual blindness keeps us from knowing God—walking in Christ's light is the key to knowing God's heart and character.

John 8:13-18 The Pharisees questioned Jesus's authority, claiming Jesus could not testify for Himself. Jesus insisted that His authority comes from God and asserted that the Old Testament pointed to Him. Still, the Pharisees remained blind to the meaning of the Scriptures they spent so much time studying.

John 8:19-20 Jesus said to know Him is to know the Father. Hebrews 1:3 says, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature." When we get to know Jesus, we get to know God! The Pharisees stubborn refusal to believe in Jesus kept them from knowing God and experiencing the fullness of life in Him.



START HERE

Spiritual sight requires more than information—it requires divine light, proper vision, and humility. In John 8:12-20, Jesus revealed Himself as the Light of the world, grounded His authority in His relationship with the Father, and exposed the tragedy of spiritual blindness. This passage challenges us to consider not only where the light is present, but whether we are willing and able to see.

DISCUSS

Is there an area in your life in which you might be choosing blindness over sight? What would it look like to ask the “Light of the world” to give insight and clarity where you need it most?

ADDING CLARITY

Jesus as the Light of the world develops further the affirmation in the prologue that Jesus was “the light of men” and that “that light shines in the darkness” (1:4-5). On this basis, Jesus exhorted His hearers to put their trust in the light while they had Him with them, so they might become “children of light” (12:35-36). Jesus’s concluding testimony is that He came into the world as light so that no one who believes in Him should remain in darkness (12:46). Yet, according to the evangelist, the verdict is this: light has come into the world, but people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil (3:19-21).

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Jesus is the light that makes sight possible.

John 8:12: *Jesus spoke to them again: “I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life.”*

Unpacking John 8:12

The ability for the eye to respond to light is crucial. No matter how healthy a person’s eyes, vision is impossible without illumination. When the lights go out, even familiar spaces become disorienting. We do not argue with the darkness; we look for light. Only illumination allows the eye to do what it is designed for—to see clearly. Jesus’s statement, “*I am the light of the world,*” made clear He is the means of spiritual sight.

Jesus’s statement seems like an abrupt change from the story we covered last week about the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). You might recall that Bible scholars, while fairly confident in the biblical authority of the encounter with the woman, question where in the Gospels order it originally belonged, which could contribute to the unexpected order of events. Nevertheless, in today’s text, we see Jesus once again addressed the crowds in the presence of the Pharisees. Much of Jesus’s teaching took place in public spaces like the temple grounds. He never hid His ministry under dark of night or taught in secret. He taught openly, even when making statements like this that would ultimately lead to His arrest.



Jesus's ministry was characterized by His call to walk out of spiritual darkness and into light. The Pharisees, however, were often characterized by the opposite—pre-arranging “gotcha” moments for Jesus in attempts to discredit His ministry, manipulating people like the woman in last week's lesson, or planting a diseased person in Jesus's path on the Sabbath to see if He would perform a healing “work.” The Pharisees mission was so marked by deeds done in darkness that on the night of His arrest, Jesus confronted their deception saying, *“Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a criminal? Every day while I was with you in the temple, you never laid a hand on me. But this is your hour—and the dominion of darkness”* (Luke 22:52-53). Even His trial broke protocol and was conducted by a sham court in the middle of the night.

Honest, open teaching and a clear explanation of beliefs are marks of a healthy church and the hallmark of Jesus's ministry. Jesus taught clearly, though spiritual blindness rooted in pride prevented others from seeing clearly. When churches and believers are clear in what they believe and why they believe it, they align themselves with Jesus, in whom there is no darkness (1 John 1:5).

Light is a prominent theme throughout Scripture and was the first thing ordered in the creation story: *“Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness”* (Genesis 1:3-4). In Exodus, God led the people through the wilderness by a pillar of fire to guide them by night (Exodus 13:21-22). When Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world,”* He was identifying Himself fully with the Father, who created light and embodied light to lead His people.

In Psalm 27, David declared, *“The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom should I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—whom should I dread?”* (Psalm 27:1). God's light is more than a physical revelation—it is a spiritual truth to embody. Light represents God's presence, wisdom, and protection. When David was attacked by the Philistines he prayed, *“I am obligated by vows to you, God; I will make my thanksgiving sacrifices to you. For you rescued me from death, even my feet from stumbling, to walk before God in the light of life”* (Psalm 56:12-13).

Isaiah pointed toward the coming Messiah as one having the same light attributed to God in the Old Testament. Isaiah 9:2 says, *“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness.”* Isaiah prophesied that the One to come would be of the same substance and perform the same works as the Father. Furthermore, this light would not be confined to the Israelites. In Isaiah 49:6, God spoke, *“It is not enough for you to be my servant raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring the protected ones of Israel. I will also make you a light for the nations, to be my salvation to the ends of the earth.”*

D.A. Carson writes, *“light is the symbol of the presence of God, the revealing of truth, and the overcoming of darkness. To say, ‘I am the light’ is to claim nothing less than divine authority.”*



When the Pharisees heard Jesus's words, they were not confused by His intent. Jesus proclaimed to be One with the Father.

In 325 AD, the Council of Nicaea convened in Constantinople to address a major issue of theological debate—what is the nature of Jesus and what is His eternal relationship with the Father? From that council and later ratified by the Council of Constantinople in 381, the Nicene Creed was adopted. For more than 1600 years believers around the world have united under this statement of faith:

*“We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God, light from light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one being with the Father;
through him all things were made”*

When Jesus proclaimed, *“I am the light of the world,”* He was not using a random analogy. Rather, He boldly declared Himself the long-awaited Messiah of the same substance as the Father. Further, He affirmed what the prophet Isaiah foretold—His light would extend beyond Israel, bringing salvation to the nations.

DISCUSS

- *What do the characteristics of light and darkness help us understand about the reality of life apart from and with Christ?*
- *What did Jesus promise to those who follow Him? How should that impact our lives today?*
- *Where might you be trying to “see” without fully trusting (or seeking out) Christ’s light? How can you seek Him in this area?*

2. Jesus has the authority to testify.

John 8:13-18: *So the Pharisees said to him, “You are testifying about yourself. Your testimony is not valid.”*

“Even if I testify about myself,” Jesus replied, “my testimony is true, because I know where I came from and where I’m going. But you don’t know where I come from or where I’m going. You judge by human standards. I judge no one. And if I do judge, my judgment is true, because it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. Even in your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am the one who testifies about myself, and the Father who sent me testifies about me.”



Unpacking John 8:13-18

An eye exam is only helpful if you trust the guidance of the one sharing the results. An exam on its own does no good without faith in the diagnosis that is received. In these verses, the Pharisees heard Jesus's claims but put no faith in His authority. Thus, they gave further evidence of their spiritual blindness.

Though they were familiar with Scripture, they did not recognize God standing right in front of them. In John 5:39-40, Jesus called out the Pharisees on their judicious studying but lack of faith saying, *"You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me. But you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life."* In their stubborn and persistent lack of faith, they fulfilled the very words of the prophet Isaiah, *"Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving'"* (Isaiah 6:9, NIV).

The Pharisees immediate response to Jesus's proclamation was, in essence, to call a foul. Their argument? Jesus could not claim He is the Light of the world without being verified by the testimony of another witness. This critique was based on Deuteronomy 19:15: *"One witness cannot establish any iniquity or sin against a person, whatever that person has done. A fact must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."* They argued Jesus's testimony could not be valid because testimony about oneself was inherently biased.

At this point in Jesus's ministry, any number of people could have attested to His miracles and teachings. To this point, Jesus had turned water into wine (John 2:1-11), healed a royal official's son (John 4:46-54), and healed the man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-16). In fact, the Pharisees had already investigated the miracle at Bethesda and heard the testimony of the healed man, who claimed Jesus made him well. Yet, for some, no amount evidence is enough. The Pharisees had drawn their own conclusions about Jesus, and would not be swayed, despite the evidence. Without faith, they could not see the Savior of the world standing right in front of them. As Hebrews 11:6 says, *"Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."*

In verses 14-18, Jesus argued vigorously that His testimony was valid because He knew where He came from and He knew where He was going. He did not need human witness to attest to His divinity. Furthermore, He argued, His second witness is God Himself, who sent Christ, and made Him both a credible witness and an authoritative judge. N.T. Wright comments, "Jesus does not defend himself by appealing to credentials, but by appealing to communion. His authority flows from where He comes from—and where He is going."

What does it look like for Jesus to have authority in our lives? First, submitting to Jesus's authority is the starting point of salvation. Hebrews 11:6 says, *"Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."* Humbling ourselves under Christ's authority is the beginning of



salvation but is not a one-time event. Believers are to submit to Christ's authority in every area of our lives on an ongoing basis.

DISCUSS

- *How did Jesus explain the validity of His testimony in verses 14-18?*
- *What does this passage teach about the source of spiritual authority?*
- *What are some areas we might be tempted to set aside Jesus's authority in favor of our own?*
- *How might your trust in Jesus deepen if you viewed His commands as guidance from the One who truly sees?*

3. To refuse a diagnosis is to choose spiritual blindness.

John 8:19-20: *Then they asked him, "Where is your Father?"*

"You know neither me nor my Father," Jesus answered. "If you knew me, you would also know my Father." He spoke these words by the treasury, while teaching in the temple. But no one seized him because his hour had not yet come.

Unpacking John 8:19-20

Many people avoid eye exams, not because they doubt science, but because they fear the results. Ignoring vision problems doesn't prevent deterioration; it only delays correction. In ophthalmology, untreated blindness is rarely sudden—it's progressive. Often, it's not that help isn't available; it is refused.

The Pharisees responded with a question, "*Where is your Father?*" (v. 19) Whether they were genuinely asking or trying to make an insult is unclear. Questioning a person's paternity (which they will do more vehemently later in this chapter), was an insult of the greatest degree. Jesus referred to God as His Father, but the Pharisees were unwilling to believe this could be the case. While their motivation may be unclear, their spiritual condition was not. Because of their lack of faith, spiritual blindness continued.

Christ responded, "*You know neither me nor my Father [. . .] If you knew me, you would also know my Father.*" To know Jesus is to know God. Colossians 1:15 describes Jesus as "*the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*" In other words, to see Jesus is to see the Father. If we want to know God better, we look to the Son. If we want to understand God's character and actions, we look to the Son. If we want to see God's heart, we look to the Son. Jesus shows us what God is like because Jesus is one with the Father and Spirit and Jesus is fully God.



For some, coming to Christ is the natural progression of growing up at the feet of Jesus—seeing and accepting Him as Savior and Lord seems natural. For others, years of pain and pride blind them to salvation until a moment when Christ’s love penetrates their hearts. Still, there are others for whom no amount of testimony or fulfillment of prophecy will be enough. Like the Pharisees, they see Christ’s activity and hear the testimony of people changed by His love yet remain unchanged. They hear the invitation to step into Christ’s light but stubbornly choose to remain in spiritual darkness.

The prophet Isaiah warned against choosing spiritual blindness:

*“Listen, you deaf!
Look, you blind, so that you may see.
Who is blind but my servant,
or deaf like my messenger I am sending?
Who is blind like my dedicated one,
or blind like the servant of the LORD?
Though seeing many things, you pay no attention.
Though his ears are open, he does not listen.”*
—Isaiah 42:18-20

When we come by faith to Jesus, accepting Him for what we know, and trusting Him to teach and to save, we step out of spiritual blindness and into His light. As we consider not only our own spiritual condition, but also those we love, our prayer should be that God will call all *“out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (1 Peter 2:9).

Walking in the light is an ongoing act of faith and discipleship for believers. In Ephesians, Paul wrote to believers, yet he prayed for their spiritual sight to improve as they lived out their faith. *“I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength”* (Ephesians 1:17-19).

While the Pharisees chose to remain in spiritual darkness, believers are called to walk continuously in the light of Christ. In the last verses of Ephesians, Paul gave a call to obedience that resonates with us today. It is not enough to have only encountered Christ, the light of the world, we must continue to walk in His light daily and live for Him. *“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”* (Ephesians 5:8)

John 8:12-20 reminds us spiritual sight is not automatic. Light must be present, authority must be received, and hearts must remain open to correction. Jesus stood before the Pharisees as the Light of the world, yet they returned home as blind as ever. The same invitation is extended to us—not just to acknowledge the light, but to walk in it.



DISCUSS

- *What did Jesus tell the Pharisees about the indications of not knowing Him?*
- *How is it possible to possess religious knowledge yet remain spiritually blind? Can you think of a time when your knowledge surpassed your faith?*
- *What signs might indicate familiarity with Scripture has replaced intimacy with God?*

DEEPER FOCUS

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *Based on this passage and other Scriptures (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3), what does Jesus teach about the relationship between knowing Him and knowing God? Why is this understanding important to our faith?*
- *Where do you see examples of people encountering Christ's light yet resisting it. What kinds of things keep people from truly seeing Jesus?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

- *As a group, read Ephesians 1:17-19 aloud. According to Paul, what increases in the lives of believers whose "eyes of the heart" have been enlightened?*

APPLY

- *Where might God be inviting you to move out of spiritual blindness and into clearer sight right now? Is there an area of your life where you know Christ's light is present, but you have hesitated to fully trust or follow Him? What would it look like, this week, to take one step of faith toward walking more fully in His light?*

REFERENCES

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