

Jesus the Light of the World

Spillman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

Dr. Powell Dew, Jr.

December 4, 2022

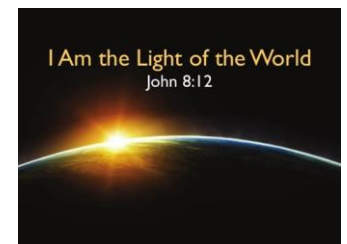
Text: Isaiah 9:2-7 and John 8: 12-30

Purpose: Jesus has come to bring light to us in a weary land. Those that come unto Jesus and believe will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

This past week I as was preparing my sermon for today, I was reviewing the passage of scripture I wanted to use this morning and saw our New Testament passage of scripture from a totally new perspective. I was able to see today's passage in John and the surrounding chapters in light of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. Over the years I have preached on the seven "I AM" statements found in the Book of John and focused on who Jesus said He was. Usually when I speak about those seven phrases, I usually focus on a few words and move on to the next phrase. This week I was able to see it all in a new light. Last week we examined what Jesus said about himself being the "Bread of Life" in which Jesus said we are to eat and drink of Him.



This week's focus is on another of Jesus' declarations concerning Himself. Over the four weeks of Advent, I want to explore what Jesus has said about Himself. Jesus said in John 8:12, "*I am the light of the*



world. *He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.*” All of us have experienced a time in our life when we thought we could walk in the darkness and find our way to where we were going. Usually that trip ends in a stubbed toe or a skinned knee. We need light to see where we are going and we need the light of Jesus Christ to guide us in a darkened world.

Through the years, I have heard many of my Sunday school teachers and my professors in seminary say, “*Every text has a context.*” What that tells us as students of God’s word, is that we need to not only look at the words that are said, we also need to see the circumstances in which those words are spoken. Who is the author speaking to? What audience is the person addressing? What is happening prior to the verse? What happened afterwards? Every text has a context.

Let me draw for you this morning the context in which Jesus is saying “*I am the Light of the World.*”

The Feast of Tabernacles¹

One of the Jewish celebrations that occurs in late fall is called the Feast of Tabernacles. Sometimes it is called the Festival of Booths. You may even hear the word or read on your calendar the holiday called “Sukkoth.” All of these refer to the same celebration.

In the Bible, all Israelites were required to come to the temple three times a year. During the Feast of Tabernacles, the people were commanded to build small temporary



shelters (booths) during the holiday while they were in Jerusalem. This was done to remind them that their ancestors had spent forty years in the wilderness in temporary shelters. It is also known as the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16, 34:22). This was observed after all of the crops had been harvested and gathered in.

It was a celebration of great joy. It celebrated God’s *past* goodness and provision while they were in the wilderness and it also celebrated how good God had been with the completion of *this* year’s harvest.



This festival occurs on the 15th day of Tishri (the seventh month of the Jewish calendar) which usually occurs in late September or mid-October. It also falls five days after the solemn Day of Atonement. The Feast of Tabernacles lasts for seven days. The first day and the day after the Feast are considered sacred assemblies or Sabbaths. No work was to be done on those days.

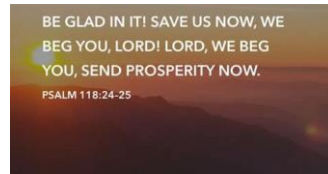
During the days when the Temple was operating, Jewish pilgrims would flock to Jerusalem. They came from every town and village, near and far. It was a trip filled with joy. The pilgrims focused on building their leafy booths which lined the streets located within a half of a mile from the Temple. There would be thousands upon thousands of small booths constructed the day before the feast began. At sundown the shofar (a ram’s horn) would sound announcing the arrival of the feast. I can just picture the scene as thousands of families would build their campfires around the hillsides of the Temple.



Each day, the priests would perform a water ceremony bringing water from the Pool of Siloam and another would bring water from a small stream north of Jerusalem. The water was poured out onto the basin in the Temple. At the proper time, the people would wave palm branches and quote from Psalm 118:25, *“Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send us prosperity.”*



Psalm 118 was viewed as a Messianic Psalm. That is why when Jesus entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the people waved palms and shouted, *“Save Now,”* which is the Hebrew word, *“Hosanna.”* The Feast of Tabernacles was a celebration of the coming Messiah. This is the same imagery given in Revelation 7:9-10 where the redeemed Saints worship with palm branches around the throne of God and the Lamb.



That background information is important because what we see happening the next night is even more impressive. During the second evening of the Feast of Tabernacles, the people would gather in the outer court of the Temple known as the Court of Women. In the center of the court stood four towering menorahs (lamp stands), each with four branches with oil lamps. From one source I read this week it said many of the participants would carry candles as well.

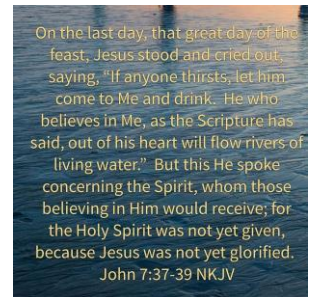
The outline of the nearby Judean hills was clearly visible at night because of the full harvest moon that lit up the night sky.



Soon afterwards, a group of Levites gathered in the Inner Court known as the court of Levites. They stood on top of the fifteen steps that led into the Holy of Holies and down into the court of Women. The Levites began to play flutes, trumpets, harps and other stringed instruments. They sang the fifteen Psalms (Psalms 120 -135). After each Psalm they would descend to the next step. This ceremony was repeated each night.

I have been to Jerusalem and stood on the Mount of Olives and looked down on the Temple Mount. What a magnificent night of celebration that was to those in Jesus' day. On the last night of the Feast, the priests gave three sets of seven blasts on a silver trumpet. The priests made seven circuits around the altar. As they marched, they sang Psalm 118:25 and the people waved palm branches.

All of that background information helps us get our bearings and helps us have a context in which Jesus began to teach and preach in the Temple. It was on that last day that Jesus entered into the Temple and began to say, *“If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his hear will flow rivers of living water.”* (John 7:37-38) This was a word from Jesus mirroring what had just happened earlier that day with the water being poured out on the altar. Jesus was reinterpreting the Feast to point to the fact that He (Jesus) was the complete fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles. The longed-for Messiah was standing in the midst of them.



A great debate broke out, with many believing and others denying Jesus.

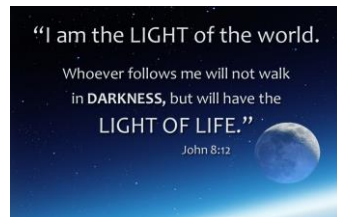
- They could not accept Jesus because they thought he was from Nazareth and did not know He was born in Bethlehem as the scriptures had foretold.
- They could not accept Jesus as the Messiah because they said his seed would come from the line of David. They did not know Jesus' family tree as listed in Matthew chapter one and in Luke chapter three.

The religious leaders rejected Jesus and even gave orders to have Him arrested. The One they sang about the night before was standing in their midst and yet they sought to kill him.

But His time was not yet come. You will notice that theme over and over in the Book of John. His time was not yet come.

Jesus records that it was the day after the Feast of Tabernacles when Jesus returned from the Mount of Olives to teach again in the Temple.

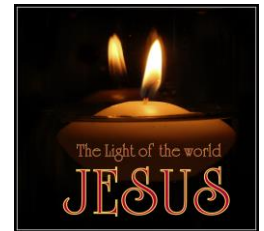
(John 7:2, 7:38, 8:2) They tried to trap Jesus by bringing to Him, a woman that was caught in adultery. After her accusers left, Jesus turns to the crowds still gathered and said, *"I am the light of the world, He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness."* (John 8:12)



The Pharisees *knew* that Jesus' words were a Messianic claim. They had just watched six nights as the community call out loud for the Messiah to come and *"Save us."*

They were well aware of the many titles in scripture that related to light: the scriptures said the Messiah was the *"Star out of Jacob"* – the *"Light of Israel"* – the *"Light of the nations (gentiles)"* – a *"Refiner's Fire"* – a *"burning lamp"* – and the *"Sun of Righteousness."* Isaiah 9:2-7, which we read earlier, proclaimed the coming age of God where there would be a great light. Here Jesus was – *the Light of the World* – being rejected once again by those that should have seen and known it most.

Jesus even reinforced that He was the light of the world by giving sight to a blind man. After healing the man who was born blind, he said, *"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."*



(9:2) I find it almost comical that the problem the Pharisees had with this healing was that it was done on the Sabbath.

Israel was in a period of darkness and they could not see the very one they longed for was standing before them, teaching in the Temple. The darkness the nation was experiencing was immense. The nation was occupied by a foreign power, the Romans. The people longed for the birth of the one who would restore their rejoicing and revive their joy. It was the general feeling among the nation that the Messiah would come and free them from the oppression they were under and reestablish their independence.

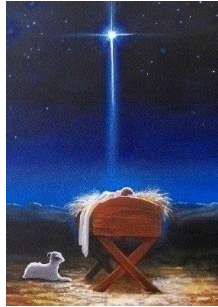
The Light was there but so few received it.

Light enables us to see. It illuminates our dark world. It brings truth and justice with it when it comes. There is a two-fold aspect of this light I want to point out to you this morning. **First**, the light of the world, Jesus Christ,

enables us to see ourselves as we really are. **Secondly**, it enables us to see who God really is and how we feel about Him.

I. The “Light of the World” Illuminates Us and How we Really Are²

The Light of the World illuminates us and how we really are. That Baby born in Bethlehem so very long ago, came as the light to a dark world.



A. The Age of Despair and Gloom

We live in a time where many are feeling despair and gloom. Night after night and day after day, we read of another tragic natural disaster. We hear of typhoons in the Philippines, earthquakes in various parts of the world, excessive heat on one part of the world and extreme cold in others.



We read in the daily paper of break-in after break-in. Robbery and murder are common occurrences in our county. Almost each week we read of another high-profile person committing suicide. The tabloids and television tell us about the latest divorce or drug abuse among today’s celebrities.

If all of that is not bad enough, our culture tells us we are not worth much if we do not brush with the right toothpaste or wash our hair with the right shampoo. We are considered nothing if we don’t use the right jargon or wear

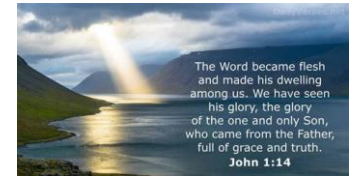
the right designer clothes. A great sense of worthlessness and “nobodiness” permeates our day.

B. Jesus Can Illuminate our Feelings at that Point

Jesus can help us by giving light to our life at this very point. We have worth simply because of who our Creator is. God made us from the dust of the earth and breathed life into us. It is He who has made us, not we ourselves.

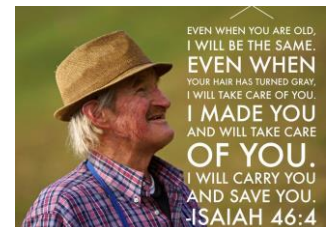
God called His creation good, but sin entered in. That sin is what has separated us from God. That sin has created a world that is self-centered instead of God centered. When we are only concerned about “me, myself, and I,” the world becomes dark and dangerous. It was into this darkness that Jesus came.

We are reminded in John 1:14 that the “*Word became flesh*” and dwelt among us. Jesus came as the “light of the world” to draw attention to our need for Him. He came to draw attention to our sin. He came to draw attention to our need for a Savior.



C. Because God Loves Us – We were Created Because God Loves Us – The Word Became Flesh

All of us are here because God so loved us that He created us. God loved us so much that He came in the flesh to redeem us and bring us back into a relationship with God.



- The scripture says we are all fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:14)
- The scripture reminds us that even the hairs on our head are numbered. (Matthew 10:30)
- The scripture reminds us even if we make our bed in hell, God knows we are there. (Psalm 139:8)

And yet we know something is wrong with our world and with ourselves. There is the desire to do right, but we often do wrong. There is the desire to not sin, yet we lapse back into the thing we do not want to do.

That is why Jesus Christ came to be our Savior. He came so that we might have life and have it more abundantly. He came to bring light to our dark world. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

We are important and valuable to God because He came to redeem us!

II. The “Light of the World” Illuminates How we Feel about God

The Light of the world illuminates how we feel about God.

A. Believe and Be Saved

Over the years, as I have read the Book of John, I am still drawn to one verse of scripture.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night wanting answers to some of his questions. In that conversation that night, Jesus said to him, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His*



only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

Jesus Christ gave Nicodemus light that night about who God really is. God loves us and wants us to be in a relationship with Him. He is extending His love to us even when we don’t deserve it. God gave His very best, Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, to redeem us and restore what was broken by sin.

Over and over as Jesus confronted people, he extended salvation to them if they would only believe. Believe – Believe – Believe. That is what is required to be able to come into the light and be illuminated. Over and over God is calling lost sinners to repentance if they would only come and believe. God has done all of this for us so we can live not only now with His Holy Spirit, but for all eternity in a place prepared by Himself for us.

B. By Grace We are Saved

For it is by Grace we are saved, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

(Ephesians 2:8-9) So many people feel as if they need to get a certain part of their life right before they can receive the free gift of grace and forgiveness from God. They feel they need to stop smoking, or stop cussing, or stop drinking, or stop some other activity. If we wait to clean ourselves up to be good enough to be forgiven, we will never be good enough, we will never be holy enough, for a Holy God to accept us. Our very best will never measure up to the holiness of God to be acceptable to God.



We need to realize we are accepted just as we are – sin and all. But God loves you so much that he will not leave you in your sin. He will forgive you and wash you white as snow. God will give you the power to be able to live a more righteous and holy life. You cannot do it on your own. When we believe and receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, He changes us and gives us His Spirit.

That Spirit that will come and live within us and will enable us to live a victorious life. We are reminded in I John, *“Greater is He that is in you, then he that is in the world.”* (I John 4:4) We can be overcomers (of sin) by His Spirit not by our own efforts.



Years ago, Chris Tomlin wrote a song that crystallized this idea of God coming to mankind. In this song, we find our response to the Light of the World.

Light of the World – by Chris Tomlin

Light of the world,
You stepped down into darkness.
Opened my eyes let me see.
Beauty that made this heart adore you,
Hope of a life spent with you.



(Chorus)

So, here I am to worship, Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that you're my God,
You're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy, Altogether wonderful to me.

King of all days, Oh so highly exalted,
Glorious in heaven above.
Humbly you came to the earth you created.
All for love's sake became poor.

(Chorus)

Here I am to worship, Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that you're my God,
You're altogether lovely, Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me.
"Here I Am To Worship"

I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that
cross.
I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that
cross.

(Chorus)

So, here I am to worship, Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that you're my God,
You're altogether lovely, Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me.
So “Here I am to worship”

In our world of darkness – a world filled with sin, guilt, desperation and despair, estrangement and alienation – We can boldly say, “Jesus is the Light!”



LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Summary of Feast of Tabernacles from “The Feasts of the Lord” by Kevin Howard and Marvin Rosenthal, p. 135+

² Outline from Zondervan 2007, Pastors Annual, p. 338