

Light of the World  
John 8:12-20  
February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2026

1. \_\_\_\_\_ the light of the world (John 8:12a)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ the light of the world (John 8:12b)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ the light of the world (John 8:13-20)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Applying the Word  
When the world feels \_\_\_\_\_, turn to the  
\_\_\_\_\_ of the world.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on John 8:12-20

1. What common themes do we see in John 7 and John 8?
  - a. 7:27-29, 41-42, 52; 8:14
  - b. 7:34-36; 8:21-23
  - c. 7:30, 32, 44; 8:20, 59
2. Why are light and darkness such powerful and common themes in the Bible? Why do they resonate with people across time and cultures?
3. What are the similarities between the pillar of fire that led the people of Israel in Exodus 13:21-22 and Jesus as the light of the world for us?
4. Trace the theme of “light” in John’s gospel. What seems to be the key idea? 1:4-9; 3:19-21; 5:35 (note who is the light in this verse); 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36; 46
5. Is it legitimate for Jesus to simply appeal to His own testimony and that of the Father to support His identity? (8:18) What does that tell us about ultimate authority? What other evidence has Jesus provided to support His identity?
6. How do Philippians 2:15-16 and Ephesians 5:7-11 use the language of “light” to describe believers and the impact we should have in the world? In those texts, what are we called to do?

## Light of the World

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Big idea: When we follow Jesus, the light of the world, we don't walk in darkness.

### Intro

There are some things we take for granted in the modern world, and light is one of them.

You walk into a room and flip a light switch and the light comes on and you leave it on for as long as you want. You walk out, you flip the light switch off, or not and you get a lecture from your dad.

But that hasn't been the norm until very recently.

Bill Nordhaus, an economist at Yale, studied the economic history of lighting, and it's actually more interesting than it sounds. Specifically, he wanted to calculate how expensive lighting has been throughout history.

Native Americans made a type of candle out of dried salmon. People in the tropics would catch fireflies. In northern Scotland they caught an oily seabird called a storm petrel that they would kill, stick a wick down their throat, and light.

4,000 years ago in ancient Babylon, people could burn oil in a small lamp for lighting, but it was very expensive, too expensive for the average poor person. He estimated that a day's wages could get you about 10 minutes of light. That would be similar around the world in ancient times. Lighting was difficult and expensive, so most people were in the dark most of the time after the sun went down.

One big improvement came when people began to use whale oil, which provided slightly cheaper light. Not great for the whales, but good for the people who were in the dark.

The real big leap came when people discovered they could process oil from the ground and make kerosene in the 1850's. Instead of one day's wages getting you 10 minutes of light, a day's wage could get you 5 hours of light.

The bigger leap came with electric lights. As they continued to improve, we get to where we are now. One day's wages will on average get you 20,000 hours of light. It's so cheap, we throw them on Christmas trees and light up our homes and streets. You might leave on outside lights all night long for security. You might have a nightlight in your child's room that glows constantly. Your phone has a flashlight that could stay on for 9 hours with a full charge. We're saturated with light. We dim the lights now not because we have to but because we want to. We use candles for smell and ambiance, not necessity.

But that has not been the case historically. The world was a dark place.

But it wasn't just a dark place physically. Makes sense then that the Bible would so frequently use metaphors of light and darkness. Those metaphors were used of the coming Messiah.

**Isaiah 9:2** The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them.

**Isaiah 42:6b-7** And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, <sup>7</sup> To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.

Jesus came to a world in darkness and He announced Himself as the light of the world. John has already danced around those themes several times, but John 8:12 contains Jesus' clear identification of Himself as the light of the world.

What does that mean?

How does that affect us?

How do we know its true?

1. **Identifying** the light of the world (John 8:12a)

a. Setting

i. Chapters 7-8 as a single unit taking place during the feast of tabernacles

1. Debate and discussion over his origin

- a. **John 7:27** "However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from."
- b. **John 8:14b** 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.

2. Discussion around where he is going

- a. **John 7:34** "You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come."
- b. **John 8:21** "I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come."

3. They sought to seize him and stone him

- a. **John 7:30** So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.
- b. **John 8:20b** and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.

ii. Quick note on 7:53-8:11

- 1. Oldest and best Greek manuscripts do not include it
- 2. It is an unnatural break between 7:52 and 8:12
- 3. It uses vocabulary and styles of writing that don't match the rest of John
- 4. None of the early church fathers who wrote commentaries on John's gospel include it.
- 5. However, it is consistent with the teaching of Christ and doesn't affect any Christian doctrine.
- 6. We don't need to be afraid of the transparency of Bible preservation and translations. This isn't hidden. This doesn't change our view of the inspiration or reliability of scripture. We can be grateful for good scholarship that helps us access the original writings with great confidence.
- 7. I've opted to focus our attention on the next section.

iii. The Feast of Tabernacles

- 1. In addition to the temporary shelters and the daily water ritual, there was a great torch that was lit at night.
- 2. Kent Hughes - In the center of the treasury four great torches were set up. Some accounts say that the torches were as high as the highest walls of the temple and that at the top of these golden candelabra were great bowls holding sixty-five liters of oil. There was a ladder for each candelabrum, and in the evening young, healthy priests would carry the oil up to the top, where they would light the protruding wicks. The great flames that leapt out of these torches illumined the whole temple and much of Jerusalem. It was spectacular!

3. The Mishnah describes how people would dance with torches in hand and musical instruments playing in the background.
4. V. 20 tells us they were in the treasury, which was in the court of the women with 13 chests that people could place offerings in for different purposes. It was probably daytime now, but they would be in the shadow of this great candelabra that towered above them and the night before had lit up the temple complex and even cast light that could be seen all over Jerusalem.
5. One ancient Jewish source reported that the lights were so bright that “there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect [their] light.”

b. OT background

i. Exodus

1. If the Jews are celebrating a feast commemorating their Exodus from Egypt and Jesus tells them He is the true light that they should follow and not be in darkness, what event will they be reminded of from their past?
2. **Exodus 13:21-22** And the LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. <sup>22</sup> He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.
3. Reminded of God leading them by a pillar of fire at night as they fled Egypt heading out into a wilderness that was vast and unknown and probably a little scary.
4. The Israelites of the exodus probably found great comfort in looking up to the pillar of fire (which must have been an awesome thing), knowing that it was God going before them to lead and give them light. They’re in an unfamiliar wilderness with an enemy following hard behind them

ii. **Psalms 27:1** The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?

iii. **Psalms 119:105** Thy word is a lamp to my feet, And a light to my path.

iv. **Proverbs 6:23** For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life

c. He is the light “of the world,” not merely of the Jewish people but the light available and shining truth to the entire world.

2. **Following** the light of the world (John 8:12b)

a. Following is natural – appropriate thing to do with light if it is the glorious pillar of fire setting out the way in the wilderness, someone with a flashlight on a dark trail.

b. Two results of following the light of the world:

i. Will not walk in darkness

ii. Will have the light of life

c. Contrast between light and dark

i. Intellectually: light refers to truth (Psalm 110:105) and darkness to falsehood (Rom 2:19)

ii. morally: light refers to holiness (Rom 13:12) and darkness to sin (Prov 4:19)

- iii. Satan's kingdom is the domain of darkness (Col. 1:13; Eph 6:12) and Jesus is the source of life and the Light that shines in the darkness of the lost world.
- d. When we walk in darkness, we are confused about the big questions of life, meaning, and purpose.
  - i. In literal darkness, we stumble over unseen objects – toys left out, chair legs, small pets.
  - ii. In the darkness of life without Christ, we stumble over the obstacles of life that we don't have the ability to understand.
    - 1. Why did this awful thing happen?
    - 2. Why did this person sin against me?
    - 3. Why can't I do what is right?
- e. What we get is the light of life
  - i. We "have" the light of life – He is with us as our present possession
  - ii. The light "of life" – Carson says this is a genitive of production – light that produces life
    - 1. Light rather than darkness
    - 2. Life rather than death
  - iii. Life is still hard and there are still missing puzzle pieces, but the big picture makes sense now for the one who follows Jesus, the light of the world.
    - 1. God is redeeming a people and making us more and more like His Son.
    - 2. Obstacles that we bump into rather than causing us to stumble, we see as allowed by a good and sovereign God to refine us and cast us upon Christ.
  - iv. As I prepared for this, I came across some notes from when I studied this passage almost exactly 19 years ago to teach it at Crossroads when I was an intern serving as the college pastor. That week I was distracted. We had just learned about some complications with our then unborn child's heart rate. As I was working on this talk I asked myself "What difference does it make that Jesus is the light of the world in our current situation of fear and uncertainty?" Not asking this to come up with a moving personal illustration, but because I needed to know. Does this thing I am about to teach make any practical difference in my life? The conclusion I came to was that Jesus as the light of the world has revealed God to us through His life (John 10:9 – if you have seen Me you have seen the Father). He reveals a God who is caring, compassionate, and condescends to love us and be concerned about our lives. He also reveals a God who is absolutely sovereign over the affairs of life. I can trust a God like that. One who is good, caring, and in control.
- f. Believers are transferred into the kingdom of light
  - i. **Colossians 1:12-14** giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. <sup>13</sup> For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin
  - ii. It's saying a lot then when we say that when we follow Christ (i.e. place our saving faith in Him implying a commitment to Him as Lord) and are transferred into the light.
  - iii. And we no longer walk in darkness – meaning our lives change as we bear fruit of the new life we have been given. Over time we should be less and less characterized by the darkness

of sin. We'll never fully eradicate it in practice, but we should improve. We won't be "sinless" but we will "sin less."

3. **Verifying** the light of the world (John 8:13-20)

- a. Comes back to an argument from chapter 5 – the Jewish leaders say His testimony about Himself is invalid – 2 or 3 others are needed.
  - i. In chapter 5 He played along with that and gave the evidence of John the Baptist, His own miracles, and the Father's testimony.
  - ii. Here He points to no higher authority than His own word about Himself, what greater authority can there be?
    - 1. They have rejected the other evidence anyways. They reject the signs, won't listen to Moses, won't follow their own law.
    - 2. There is something to this that we must consider. He can't appeal to a higher authority than the Triune God. No person's "testimony" is greater. It may feel somewhat circular – Jesus is God who has come down to save us from our sins because He says He is.
      - a. But note that He does give lots of other evidence – miracles, OT prophecies fulfilled, power of His teaching, evidence of His sinless life.
      - b. But ultimately, there is no more reliable source than God Himself.
- b. He knows where He comes from (heaven, above, the Father) and where He is going (the cross when His hour has come, back to the Father's side)

4. Applying the Word

- a. When the world feels **dark**, turn to the **light** of the world.
  - i. If you find yourself frustrated by national and global events, the promotion of evil, the distortion of things that are good, we can remember that the darker the world gets, the more the light stands out.



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